OUR OWN POMPEII

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A ROMANCE OF TO-MORROW

"Là du plaisant Avril la saisin immortelle
Sans eschange le suit,
La terre sans labeur, de sa grasse mamelle
Toute chose y produit,
D'enbas la troupe sainte autrefois amoureuse,
Nous honorant sur tous,
Viendra nous saluer, s'estimant bien-heureuse
De s'accointer de nous."

—PIERRE DE RONSARD.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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TO

H. M. S. AND R. S.,

IF THEY WILL ACCEPT IT,

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED.

OUR OWN POMPEII.

CHAPTER I.

LONDON Society, about the time that our story opens, was getting a little tired of even its latest amusements. It was hoping, indeed, that some one would be kind enough to invent a new dissipation as soon as possible. It had tried "The Orleans"—had heard of "Almack's"—had danced and been danced to at "The New Club"; and was now primed, as one may say, to go off somewhere else, if only an aim should be given to it.

What could be more lucky, therefore, at this particular moment, than a happy thought that occurred to Mr Smythe, himself one of Society's favoured constituents, whom it condescended to

know, on condition that he should devote his talents to its amusements and interests.

For to Mr Smythe (he called himself Smythe, though his real name was Smith) the idea of forming "The Pompeii Club" was due.

It was to be quite unique: a grand international affair, with committees in London, Paris, Vienna, Rome, and New York, to elect its members. It was to be housed in a lovely little city of its very own — built especially for it, in imitation of the classical one, but without a too slavish following of the original. Health, comfort, and exquisite beauty were to mingle in its ideal perfection. Nestling beneath the deep wooded hills — washed by the Mediterranean ripples — it would seem an earthly Paradise of mosaic and marble, of snug chambers and noble halls, of tiny streets and breezy spaces, planned by the best architects, and filled with the brilliant life of choice and charming people.

Mr Smythe, having made up his mind that his Pompeii was feasible, and would be delightful, besides enabling him to show his good nature once more by inventing another distraction for

his friends, lost no time in calling upon Lady Marlowe, who, he knew, would enthusiastically take up his plans, and help him to carry them to a successful conclusion.

She was an extremely enterprising member of Society. She boasted that you met a greater number of "nice people" at her parties than at any other house in London. And it was characteristic of her, that although she had many other advantages, this was the only one that she ever mentioned with evident gratification. With a boldness equalled by its success, she had ventured to revive the *salon;* and was "at home" to her friends (among whom it was a privilege to count one's self) every Tuesday during the season.

Discriminating people enjoyed her evenings with a peculiar zest. She gave a certain distinguishing tone or flavour to these by including among her guests a clever, pretty, and intellectual element, "which one never meets anywhere else," everybody said; while at the same time there was always a sufficient contingent of "everybody," to prevent them from feeling that there was "nobody" there.

Both in her friendships and in her life she was very independent, without being in the least Bohemian. She was well educated and ubiquitously intellectual. She designed art needlework; she sang; she photographed. In addition to all these acquirements, she had finally shown her taste by acquiring a certain amount of beauty; and after this proof, it is needless to add she was very clever. Last, but not least, she now and then wrote (and got published) a charming novel, in the most advanced and approved of our latter-day styles — novels which busy themselves about four or five highly developed and brilliantly typical people, with elaborate and much analysed characters, who stay at or travel to delightful places in Europe, Asia, and America.

Lady Marlowe was at home; and when Mr Smythe had described his plans, she felt as though the crowning moment of her life were come.

"What a lovely place we will have!" she exclaimed. "Full of charming people — nothing but charming people. No tourists, no mob. All that is most perfect from every country. Why shouldn't it become a second Athens?"

"We must at any rate be careful that it don't become a second Corinth," said Mr Smythe. "However, I think it a capital plan; and the first thing to be done is to organise the English Committee."

So they set to work with the utmost tact and discretion to sound the "right people" on the subject. Most of the right people thought that it would be delightful if it could be managed—were anxious to be members if the club were really started—though they shrank from being placed on the committee or having their names publicly mixed up with the affair at present.

But Mr Smythe drew such glowing pictures of how delightful, how exclusive, how extremely "smart" it would be; Lady Marlowe discoursed so enthusiastically on the brilliance, the beauty, and the charm of a perfect modern life spent in a lovely and classical city (for she always spoke as though they were going to take up their abode in the ancient city, revived, as if by magic, for their exclusive benefit),—that at last the very "rightest" of the right people were won over, and the preliminary committee was formed.

The Duke of Oxford consented to be on it. Both Lord Marshford and Lord St Kevan were secured. Lord Downstreamdown represented the sporting element; and of course no committee of such a club would be complete without Jack de Barry, who, as every one knows, was the smartest man in London, though nobody quite knows why he occupied this unique position. For although he organised dances, played polo at Hurlingham, yachted at Cowes, shot in Scotland, and, in short, did the correct thing on the right spot at each particular moment, all the year round, there were hundreds of other men doing the same, who were at the same time showier, cleverer, and more ostentatious than he. Some people thought that his position was due to his having the soles of his boots blacked (in the French style). Others attributed it to his kind, pleasant, and good-hearted character — he never said an ill-natured word about anybody — but they, I fear, were probably mistaken.

When he joined, success was nearly certain. And while several other leading people completed the men's committee, the ladies' division began to

elect the ladies—the election being accompanied by such intrigues, heart-burnings, passionate appeals, and still more passionate imprecations, as the reader may try to imagine, but which cannot be described.

Then diplomatic negotiations were opened up with the various Embassies, committees were arranged in the several capitals of Europe, and the ballot simultaneously set to work over half the world to find out who were the elect and chosen people to form an ideal community, in a city which should bloom forth with every antique perfection and modern luxury.

At length the club was really started. The world in general heard about it with mingled feelings of awe and envy. It was preached against in a fashionable church. The Society papers were divided in their opinions about it—one paper even going so far as to say that it was the last vortex into which a corrupt society, drunk and maddened by luxury and vice, were about to fling themselves, before being hurled to destruction in the whirlpool of retribution. Some offensive nobodies were elected, and a few inoffensive peers were "pilled."

Indeed one duke was so treated, as a capriciously selected token intended to show that the committee were no mere respecters of persons, and selected their members by a nobler and deeper test than that of suitability and position.

It will therefore be at once seen that the whole affair was a tremendous success. There were 5000 members elected, and every member had the right of introducing a friend, if the city were not full already. A perfect site near San Remo had been selected by the provisional committee; and the city was begun at once, from plans prepared by an international committee of architects, who proposed to build it on the plan of Pompeii (the old Pompeii, as it was now called), without slavishly adhering to the original in every detail.

Of course money was a difficulty; but an American gentleman was discovered, of boundless wealth and equally boundless social ambition. It was diplomatically explained to him that, if he would build the city, it might prove a good speculation, in addition to making him a social power and giving him a world-wide reputation as a benefactor of society. However rich a man may be, he can do but

little good in the world in comparison with all the misery and poverty that weigh down the majority of the human race. And with such brilliant hopes of social philanthropy held out to him, was it likely that a clever American would forego their realisation for the sake of a few hundred thousands of pounds? Having secured the promise of £50,000 in entrance-fees, he at once concluded the bargain. And the club, being now fixed on every foundation that could give it stability, began to rise like a series of fairy palaces among the olive-clad hills that shelter the Riviera.

By the following spring everything was finished, and one warm day in February saw the city really opened. It glittered in the distance like some poet's vision of dream-wrought loveliness—its feet lapped by the sunny ripples of its southern sea, and its walls embraced by deep masses of overhanging foliage, clinging to them and overshadowing them with a flickering canopy of entwining branches, through which the sunshine broke in little points of light.

It was approached by a gateway in the wall, opening directly on to a number of diminutive

streets. They ran in all directions, and were lined by rows of tiny houses, built in exact imitation of the classical ones. Some of them, however, simply consisted of one or more bedrooms, while others had a sitting-room in addition, which could be engaged at the option of the members.

The Stadium was approached from the main street. It was paved, and laid out in lawn-tennis courts, with a track running round for chariot races — an ancient amusement that Mr Smythe hoped to revive. At the sea end of it rose a gymnasium, opening on to a noble swimming-bath. The clear water reflected a stately row of graceful statues, that paused at its brim and bent their beautiful heads over its cool green depths. The whole scene seemed to "compose" with the glowing forms of the happy bathers—swimming, diving, or resting upon the warm pavement—into a living picture of that Hellenic life which has passed away so long.

In the centre of the city was the Forum, paved with mosaic. A charming little stage was built at one end of it, with a proscenium full of tender tints and tones, given by the mingling marbles and the

rich drapery of the curtains behind them. The stage was flanked on either side by flights of marble steps leading down to the sea.

And above them might be seen a generous view of grey-green hills and far blue waters, that shone with a dark Southern radiance in the sunshine, and changed, enchanted by the moonlight, into a magic landscape of dreamy light and vague delicious distance.

Along the Forum, on either side of it, were ranged the dining-rooms, coffee-rooms, reading-rooms, and the various other apartments necessary to the collective life of the present day, each built separately in the fashion of an exquisite little classical temple, and painted throughout with frescoes, either copied from those at Pompeii or designed by the best modern artists. In the cool and spacious courts, tiny fountains fell in spray among the gold-fish. Soft fabrics waved in the doorways, or were lifted aside to open out a vision of stately colonnades, corners filled with flowers, and little peeps of blue sky—strangely dark amid the carved cornices, the clustering walls, and the shadowed doorway, that seemed to frame them.

Everything was hushed, and pervaded with the softest, the most luxurious spirit of classical felicity and calm repose. Through the gleaming vestibules and sunlit gardens, graceful and lovely Italian servants, in short clinging classical dresses, passed noiselessly to and fro.

But the splash of fountains, the sound of distant music, and the deep whispers of the distant waves, were not the only sounds that broke the stillness; for a pleasant chatter filled the halls, and indicated that all this was not some memory of buried loveliness, but one that was to yield delight to every one who should come to enjoy it.

Men in all those picturesque costumes of cloth and flannel that comfort can suggest; ladies dressed so perfectly that mute admiration should take the place of description; and ladies dressed (to put it gently) as one might see them anywhere else,—were scattered about among the glancing lights and rich shadows, admiring the buildings, chatting to their friends, or lounging on the comfortable seats and divans that were provided.

Occasionally some one would play a few notes on a piano to try its tone, or knock about the bil-

liard balls in order to see if the tables were level. There was one old gentleman scanning the wine-list to assure himself that none of his favourite vintages were omitted. And several ladies were already inquiring where the fireplace might be looked for in a classical home, becoming fiercely indignant when Mr Leo assured them that a bronze pan of charcoal was more in keeping—helped more to give the true Roman "note" to the place. One American lady repeatedly demanded an "elevator"—though where she wished to be elevated to was not perhaps so clear. The majority of English ladies declared that the place was perforated—honeycombed—with draughts; and one German baron threatened to resign when he discovered that he could not close all the windows, because there were no windows to close.

But in spite of these little *contretemps*, the general murmur of conversation expressed a feeling of gratified pleasure; and the various little exclamations of delight that fell on the air might be summarised into the constantly recurring phrase of "How delightful it all is!"

On such a day—warm as a summer's afternoon

in England, yet tempered by the Mediterranean breeze, with the perfect city at last complete, and filled with delightful and delighted people—criticism must wholly sink for once into admiration. And one could not choose a more auspicious moment than the present for congratulating Lady Marlowe and Mr Smythe, the various committees, and the whole of the members, on the brilliant fulfilment of this happiest of schemes.

CHAPTER II.

THE club was opened in the beginning of March, and the southern French trains were daily filled with members hastening to take up their quarters and assist at its success. On one of these days the corner seat of a first-class carriage was occupied by a young man who divided his attention between a newspaper and the somewhat monotonous view that France provides in such abundance. He was a good-looking young fellow, who combined a great appreciation for all that is "nicest" in life with a careless and winning grace which generally ensured his enjoyment of it, and which endeared him with a peculiar charm to his friends, of whom, it is needless to say, he had a great many. At Harrow he did some work and a great deal of play. And when he went up to Oxford to spend

those happy years which pass like a sunny dream —filled with so much joy, and friendship, and beauty, and learning, and buoyant exercise, that they seem to blend into one sweet memory, one long spell of poetry and romance — he plunged into everything with an intellectual excitement that was stimulated by the harmonious loveliness around. He worked—as he himself said—when he had nothing more important to do. He read a great deal, sitting in the deep window-seat of his dark-panelled room. He played polo and hunted. He joined the Bullingdon; spoke sometimes at the Union; knew many men in many sets; and was generally called "charming," when an adjective was required to describe him.

His chief characteristic was an inquiring energy, a restless activity both of mind and body, that was almost too unflagging, leading him to inquire so swiftly into every branch of knowledge he came across—to find so many "interesting things" to learn and accomplish — that he had been called superficial; though it must be added that what he lost in depth he gained in breadth—in surface, as it were. He had a character "large enough to

feel the irritation of small precautions"; and it therefore may not seem surprising that his relations, with that perversity which is sometimes found among even the best of relatives, considered his besetting weakness was a kind of idle and lazy carelessness — a mental slovenliness, nearly connected with a continual desire to lie on a sofa with the eyes closed. When he went to Harrow and was in the lowest form, they said it was so characteristic of him. When he managed to get into "the sixth," they said, if he had not been so lazy he might have been captain of the school. Again, when he went up to Oxford and got a first in "Mods" and a second in "Greats," they said, feeling that they were only speaking for his ultimate good, "How easy 'Mods' must be, if dear Claud got a first! Indeed we're told that it is almost impossible to take a less distinguished degree than he has done."

Having left Oxford, he found himself at twenty-five called to the Bar without any immediate prospect of briefs. What could be therefore more natural than to find him called also towards the sunshine and the South? especially as

he had the greatest inducement of all—a pleasant companion. For an old friend of his, Lord Darlington, who had once been his fag at school, and was now a frank ingenuous youth—ladies called him a pretty boy—of twenty-one, was with him. He was tall and slim, with a small aristocratic head, blue eyes, and plenty of light wavy hair, that had a habit of tumbling over his forehead as though to assert its individuality. No one had ever accused him of being unwholesomely or uncomfortably clever; on the contrary, he was delightfully simple and confiding. "Amiable" would be the word exactly to describe him, if it were not already dedicated to the process of "damning a friend with faint praise." And faint praise (even when unaccompanied by anything worse) would be quite inadequate to give an impression of Darlington's character—a pleasant, lovable character, that could be known and liked at once, without any tantalising complications which might interest one as a critic while alienating one as a friend; or unknown depths of disposition (either brilliant or portentous), among which one might suddenly find one's self left doubting and in the dark.

It must not be inferred that Claud Brownlow and Darlington were the only occupants of the carriage, for at the other end of it were three other people: Mr Leonardo Leo, a celebrated critic, poet, and musician; and Mrs Leo, who was a no less celebrated beauty, completing what they would probably call "the harmonised circle of their existence" by painting dreamy pictures or "tone movements," formless, but redolent with colour, as her friends appreciatively whispered of them.

The Leos, however, were not merely what is commonly and vulgarly known as æsthetic. They were something much rarer and higher than this. They were broadly eclectic, deeply cultured, and (imagined themselves) extremely Hellenic.

Their home in town was so hushed and darkened, so guarded and beautified—its atmosphere, as it were, was so rarefied by the highest and most exquisitely exclusive culture—that profane people had been known, after a short time, to be seized with a brutal desire to scream, or otherwise assert themselves. It is even said that once a visitor in desperation did worse, and defiantly announced that Dickens was his favourite author,

and Mozart the only composer he cared to listen to.

But Mr Leo was energetic as well as pictorial. He edited a review called 'The Highest Aim,' which was equally divided between literature, art, politics, and society. He was an ardent Radical of the "academic school," and looked eagerly forward to the time when a universal suffrage (including, as his wife said, "the stronger but unrepresented sex") would give the world an ideal government of perfect enlightenment, advancement, and justice; and when the highest literature, the noblest art, the best government, and the most brilliant and exclusive society, would not only be common, but entirely universal. As he himself said—"The time when every working man will be able to join the Arundel Society, subscribe to classical concerts, read the best literature, and join with other working men in entirely governing the country, and taking their just share of the unearned increment of the rich, is still (with the exception of the last) a long way off. But when every man has been raised to this ideal position (the poor man and the rich man alike raised from their respective poverty and riches to

a happy state of modest comfort) by universal suffrage and radical legislation, what a vast and astounding progression will have been made from our present tentative and imperfect condition!"

The fifth passenger in the carriage was the great Mr Giles. I say great, because, although he was as yet unknown to fame, beyond a moderate but ever enlarging circle of friends (and shall we whisper, victims?), he was one of the most powerful men in England.

If one wished to describe his position by using an elaborate metaphor, such as is sometimes employed in a sermon to bring home a vital truth to the congregation, one might point out how the passengers on an Atlantic steamer, as it steams forth in its beauty and elaborate perfection, hear the captain give his orders, talk to him, obey him, and know that he is in command, and is responsible for their safety. They give no thought to the immeasurable force that carries them onward, and which alone prevents them from rolling, helpless and forlorn, among the ocean billows. They laugh, and dance, and sing, and try to engage the captain in conversation, in order to show that they are on

terms of acquaintanceship with constituted authority; while far below them is a man, unseen, unknown, almost unthought of, who guides their vast momentum with his hand, driving them onward, onward towards the distant shore they cannot see, where the calm harbour invites them, and the cruel waves roar round the rocks that guard it, awaiting but the slightest mistake to destroy them utterly and for ever.

So the Liberal party had their captain, their leader; but below, out of sight, with his hand controlling the machinery, was Mr Giles. He was the President of the Centralised Executive Committee of the Representative Hundreds of the party all over the country. And if the Hundreds were a kind of informal Parliament, the Executive Committee was certainly an informal Cabinet, and Mr Giles an informal prime minister—like the holder of many other informal positions, having all the more power because his right to it was unrecognised.

When he received what he called his "tip" from the Cabinet, or the advanced portion of it with whom he was in more immediate communication (though even with regard to this he had been

known to carry out the Scriptural text, that it is more blessed to give than to receive), no Roman emperor was ever more autocratic than he.

The word went forth: the Centralised Committee were unanimous; the Hundreds agreed, and clamoured, and demanded; public opinion was triumphantly manufactured; and the Cabinet were induced to bring in, and enabled to pass, by the united voice of a great people, measures that caused the very men who passed them to feel some doubt, some apprehension—and that surprised, alarmed, and alienated the great majority of thoughtful and educated men of either party.

"But then thoughtful and educated men, from a merely voting point of view, are numerically worthless; and therefore their opinion need not be taken into account," said Mr Giles.

This was in reply to a remark of Claud's, and he now followed it up with a question.

"Then you do not fear," he asked, "that you will drive all the upper and 'propertied' classes over to the opposite camp?

"Not a bit. The Whigs will stay with us long enough to play our game; and when they have all

gone—they are gradually going over even now—we shall have perfected our machinery sufficiently to crush any opposition. I myself expect the day will soon arrive—as you suggested—when nearly all the well-to-do people will have left us. But I don't dread it; on the contrary, we shall not then be so hampered as we are now. Once let the people get the idea it is a question of the upper classes against the lower — the rich against the poor—and we are made. We shall then permanently secure a sufficiently large majority to enable us to carry out our pet schemes for the future: a graduated income-tax—with, I hope, a very steep gradient — the land relieved from the landlords, peasant proprietors, and so on. You know all about it."

"I entirely disagree with you," said Mr Leo. "I think that when the whole people have the vote—especially after we have obtained female suffrage—all class prejudice, class selfishness, and class interest will disappear. I think that the whole people will not be less, but will be more just; and I am quite sure that they will tolerate no economic fallacies."

"They intend to have more of this world's goods than they have at present," rejoined Mr Giles. "I don't know about economic fallacies; but what I do know is, that if they were fools enough not to want more than they have, we should show 'em the way."

"But surely," put in Mr Leo, "unless it were conducted on strictly equitable principles, it would simply become bribery on your part, robbery on theirs."

"Oh no. The State can't rob—that's our latest principle. You don't call taxation robbery. Well, we shall simply arrange our taxation on a new plan. What you call robbery, we shall simply call the debt that the State owes to its poorest members. Or—or—well, the restitution of that unearned increment which the rich have stolen from the community. Bless you! when the time comes we shall have the names."

Mr Leo did not like the tone of Mr Giles's remarks. He thought they were a little too much flavoured with opportunism. Being himself, as we have said before, an academic Radical, with transcendental ideas on politics—acquired partly by

a study of classical philosophy and politics, partly by an exquisite sense of the ordered progress of the universe, modelling the British constitution, as it advanced, into conformity with its laws—he felt that there was something higher than a party platform, or even a party cry; and that as the Radical party—the party of progress—were acting consistently with the laws of evolution, and were therefore scientifically right, and must ultimately prevail, it was all the less necessary to bolster them up with party dodges of a questionable character. He suggested that to interfere with contract, for instance, had been long ago proved to be both useless and economically dangerous.

"Why, sir," said Mr Giles, "you must belong to the *laissez faire* school. I didn't know that there were any of 'em left. They went out when we found that political economy wouldn't suit."

"We may not yet have discovered the true laws of political economy," said Mr Leo, in his slow deliberate way, while his "Oxford voice" enunciated every word with extreme distinctness; "but they exist, nevertheless, and are as unalterable and as certain in their operation as the laws of

science themselves. You cannot evade or set at defiance the laws of political economy without injury to yourself, unless you can alter them by altering human nature itself. Though after all," he added, more briskly, "I am not without hope that we may be able to alter human nature a little in the course of time; for I have no doubt that, like everything else, it tends to adapt itself to its environment."

"It will be rather uncomfortable if it doesn't," said Mr Giles. "Why, don't you know, not only have our party given up political economy—sent it to Satan or somewhere—free contract, unlimited competition, and *laissez faire*, but we've given up philosophical and scientific Radicalism also. All that depends on the teaching of Herbert Spencer and Darwin, and that lot. We don't intend to stand the tyranny of Science; and as for 'fundamental laws,' we don't like 'em. For instance, we don't approve of the 'extinction of the least fit'——"

"Extinction of the least fit! I should think not, indeed! Why, where would our future rulers be then?" put in Claud rather neatly.

Mr Leo was a little pained at Giles's tone. He

had, however, long considered that people of his class were useful in working the machine—with an extended franchise there is room for much machinery (of the more *useful* but less ornamental sort), and some one must work it—but that the great principles of the party should be left to be formulated by its higher minds. He therefore contented himself by saying—

"Well, well, we mustn't set the laws of science at defiance, you know. Even if religion ceases to influence us, we must still maintain a code of ethics and morality. We must remember that fundamental justice——"

"Fundamental justice now," said Mr Giles, catching at a phrase that he understood; "I don't know so much about that."

"Not very much, I think," suggested Claud.

"I don't go in for the philosophy of the thing, but I know what we want and mean to have. Why, I've got a friend in the Cabinet—I mustn't mention names—Cabinet secrets, you know. Well, he just gives me the tip, or we fix together what we want, and then I just send it round to 'the Hundreds'; and they want it—they de-

mand it unanimously—the members submit—the Cabinet wavers and gives in—and there you are!"

"I have often thought," said Claud, "that your party play with edged tools. They nurse their dangerous ideas as one might a litter of young wolves. 'They are so pretty,' one might say, 'so harmless—dear little things—just like pups!' But the day comes at last when you wake to find them a ravening pack of wolves. Then you fly, when too late, and you have to throw them one thing after another—you know the Russian story—till at last the driver has to fling himself to them in order to save his mistress and her family, whom he is driving. Though I admit," added Claud, with the lightest touch of satire in his voice, "there the analogy would most probably cease, as in *your case* the driver no doubt would throw over his passengers in order to save himself."

"I don't fear the wolves," said Mr Giles. "Why, if there are any—which, mind you, I don't admit—I'm one of them myself."

"You admit it," cried Claud.

"Well, you see, I'm not ravenous at present; I'm

only a pretty pup," said Giles, with a disagreeable laugh.

"You overlook and ignore, I think, that remarkable sense of political morality with which the English people——" began Mr Leo.

Only to be interrupted by Giles. "I don't want to argue," he said; "I don't argue—at least that's not my line. I haven't to gild the pill, or cover up the powder with jam—the Cabinet must do that; but what I have to do is to cram it down the patient's throat and make him swallow it."

The conversation here dropped. Mr Leo began to write an article for 'The Highest Aim,' on "The Unexpectedness of Political Emotion." He occasionally, however, leant forward to translate a word for Mrs Leo, who was reading alternately 'Charlot' and Rénan's 'Le Prêtre de Némi,' with a view to an article on the spirit of contemporary French literature which she was going to write for one of the magazines.

Darlington had not joined in the discussion, but had contented himself with murmuring "brute" under his breath once or twice when Mr Giles was speaking. He had long held that no repartee to an

argument you do not like is so crushing as a few strong terms, judiciously applied in the interjectionary manner. This method of treating a subject is particularly convenient to those classes who do not so much acquire their ideas, as inherit them; and who believe that the assignment of a reason in support of them is tantamount to admitting that the point in question itself is open to argument. It may be noticed in society that such words as "beast" and "robbery," purred through aristocratic lips, are considered to effectually settle and disarm the objectionable person or thing respectively; while among other classes there are many party cries—such as "free trade," for instance—which are considered to be so far above discussion that we are never gratified by hearing a single argument in their favour.

Darlington contented himself with requesting Claud not to speak to "that creature" again.

"I am sure," he added, "that your uncle can't swallow that cad."

Claud's uncle, Lord St Kevan, was a powerful Whig, who had held Cabinet office, but had somehow been omitted from the Government that was

"in" at the present moment. He still, however, believed that the future of his party would be as glorious as its past; and he regarded people like Mr Giles as useful agents, evolved by changing circumstances and advancing times in order to uphold the continued supremacy of his class. For he was a great Whig magnate. Next to the Throne and the Constitution, he centred his creed in the great families of the Revolution. He held the traditions of Grey, Melbourne, Palmerston, and Russell, and he endeavoured to carry out what he believed would have been their policy. He was still reeling, under the discovery that a Liberal Cabinet might not only contain but even be controlled by "new men." At Brooks's he sat about mysteriously in corners with other old peers, and shook his head, and planned diplomatic arrangements, acute political combinations, and high political policy. Whenever he thought the Radicals were getting too strong, for instance, he would propose that a Coalition Government should be formed. But though the chiefs of his party listened to him deferentially, as being one of the most influential and authoritative of his order, they seldom acted

on his advice; for in these levelling days the "rank and file" of a party have to be considered, and even the wishes of the constituencies themselves must to some extent be taken into account. He was, it is true, alarmed; but he had not capitulated. He still looked upon *politics* as a game in which he and his order naturally commanded, both for their country's benefit and for their own—*party government* (with its ministers, members, voters, its whole machinery indeed) being the means by which that game might be played.

But if the government of his country was slipping from his grasp, he intended at least to be absolute in his own family. The *patria potestas* should still be felt by his *gens*. It filled him with horror and indignation that Claud should have become a Conservative. He regarded it as unnatural, unbearable, and inexplicable. The county seat—he still had a county seat, which had always returned a Liberal, and now that the agricultural labourer was enfranchised, was safer than ever,—this county seat, which he had long been nursing for Claud, should now go to a distant cousin. He even hinted that it would be as well if Claud re-

membered that he was a younger nephew (the title descended to Claud's elder brother — Lord St Kevan having no children), and treated the Bar accordingly a little more as though it were a ladder, a little less as though it were horizontal and merely a suitable instrument to enable young men to pass their time pleasantly.

Claud was trying to explain all this to Darlington, when Mrs Leo looked up. The son of a peer was "the son of a peer" even to this advanced and cultured lady. She thought that the moment had come when an acquaintanceship should be made; and so, to make a beginning, she asked Darlington what he was reading. When he told her it was 'David Copperfield,' she felt that the time had arrived for her to try and raise his mental tone. So she replied (for it must be whispered that some of this lady's detractors said she was utterly devoid of tact):

"Dickens! Ah! neither I nor my husband are able to read him. I try; but I can't. I know that my taste deprives me of a great pleasure; but he seems so vulgar, so coarse. His pathos is sickening; his fun is worse—it is cockneyfied, Philistine, painfully insular."

"What novels do you read?" asked Darlington, in an awestruck voice. For he had never met any one so intellectually exclusive in his life before; and though his alarm of her was mitigated by the fact that he noticed her clothes did not fit in the least (they had grown in the ultra-æsthetic school), he still felt oppressed by her conscious superiority.

"Very few modern novels, except the best French ones. Of course I read all of those. But I can hardly bear any English novels except Howell's. All the others seem to me to be so crude. One always has the feeling that any moment one may come across a sporting scene, or something even more degrading—something that hints at stables and grooms, and coverts and race-courses. English authors don't treat their characters with his delicate and exhaustive analysis, and they generally have too much plot to make the book worth reading."

"Then you don't care for horses?" said Darlington, inconsequently.

"Yes, in their proper place—in a carriage, not in a book. But as I said before, I haven't much time for novels, because I am busy over a little work of

my own—a subject I have long taken an interest in. It is an essay on the comparison between Hellenic morality and the morality of the middle ages, as exemplified by the lives of the Medici family and the Borgias."

"Dear me!" said Darlington, with opening eyes. "They did some rum things, didn't they?"

"It is a very painful subject," replied Mrs Leo, in her soft, deep, uninflexional voice. "And if it had not been for a strong sense of duty, a desire to purify and clarify our culture from all sanguine and misleading belief in the moral virtue of the ages I have treated, I should not have ventured to undertake it." Then there was a pause in the conversation, and the only sound in the carriage was that of the train which was bearing them on towards Nice.

CHAPTER III.

A FEW nights after this the weather was warm enough at Pompeii to permit of the dinner being served out of doors.

The red glow to the westward still lingered. Soft yellows and nameless greens melted while they rose upward in the sky—upward till they seemed to turn into a tender echo of the liquid blue in the east, now changing every moment to the radiant darkness of a Southern night. Here and there a star gleamed out like a drop of fire, as the light faded back from the gathering flush of deepening colour that shone in the wings of the evening, already folded over the dying day.

Black shadows lurked among the pillars in the Forum, and shrouded the mysterious vistas between them in brooding gloom. But here and there an

electric light made a brilliant point of fire among the marbles; and the whole air towards the sea-side was filled with a subdued glow from hundreds of wax candles, that lit the numerous little tables standing around.

At one of them Darlington and Claud were seated with two other men—Jack de Barry, and a would-be social comet who was just rising on the fashionable horizon, named Hugh Flashington. He was a tall, good-looking, extremely active young man, with an effusive manner, and an affectionate greeting for everybody. He was very clever in his way, and extremely quick at assimilating other people's ideas, and reproducing them as though they were his own. He aimed at being thought dashing, brilliant, universal—a kind of modern Alcibiades, or at least a Count d'Orsay—and considered that every one was to be "taken in" if you only "took them by storm" with a sufficient battery of eloquence and diplomacy.

Perhaps he had not the amount required, for he had never been wholly successful. People sometimes found out that the truth was often in absolute opposition to his statements; and while some

were dazzled, others were more than doubtful, even coupling the ugly word "humbug" with his name. But if he wooed admiration by some doubtful means, every one admitted that he was a pleasant companion, and would prove an addition to any table.

The whole party were now nearing the close of a suitable little dinner, and the conversation, which had been fitful at first, seemed at last gradually taking the place of a somewhat silent admiration of the night and its surroundings.

"It reminds one a little of the piazza at Venice in the evening," said Darlington, helping himself to ice-pudding as he spoke; "only it's more—more like a dream, you know."

"Don't you feel as though we were all in a grand opera, just waiting for the curtain to rise?" replied Claud. "If it wasn't for us people in trousers, it might be a picture of Alma Tadema's come to life. Just look at that servant, for instance;" and he indicated a beautiful Italian youth, whose slim and graceful figure was only protected by a short clinging tunic of Indian silk, below which his well-made legs asserted themselves with classical independence.

"Yes; he is not a bad-looking fellow," said Darlington. "And they've invented a good airy costume for him, which must be very comfortable as long as it's hot and doesn't rain. But fancy him in a thunder-storm, with little streams of water running down each of his bare legs."

De Barry looked up. He was on the Committee, and had never approved of the artistic servants. He had wished, on the contrary, to import a number from the London club, who would behave and be dressed according to the strictest English idea of what is suitable. He therefore announced, with a little air of triumph, that the Italians' looks were better than their honesty, and that Smythe had had to give six of them warning that very morning for stealing spoons. "We have now telegraphed to London for some good club waiters. I shan't feel comfortable till I'm waited upon by a man in shoes and knee-breeches, who has had his hair properly done. Any one would fancy, if they turned up here, that we had left civilisation completely behind us."

"But it is so—so picturesque," said Claud.

"We don't want to be too picturesque," said De Barry. "Why, some wine was actually brought

me the other day by a creature with a moustache. It's hardly—hardly decent. We may be playing at being Romans, but at any rate we are not savages."

"Of course," said Claud, "we are only playing at being Romans; but how charming it would be if one could really wake up and suddenly find one's self living eighteen hundred years ago! Only think," he continued, as a hundred classical advantages seemed to crowd themselves forward in his mind, "no dentists, and what is better—no need of dentists, no competitive examinations, nothing to ruin one's health and spirits. There would be no top hats, tight boots, or tailor's bills—none of our modern life, which sickens us with *ennui* if we pause, and maddens us with unhealthy excitement if we rush onward in its front. Fancy a free natural existence, when no one asked 'if life were worth living,' when one hadn't to be intellectual and enlightened, when no one had crotchets, and everybody did not struggle to be fashionable. We haven't slaves nowadays, but I bet we have thousands of people who would be only too glad to be slaves if their masters would keep them from starvation."

"But there would be no clubs, no operas," said De Barry. "Have you considered that there was no food fit to eat—not even a French cook—and certainly no wine that one could possibly drink? How could one live a day without railways, telegraphs, and newspapers? Where would be the country houses, the yachts, the everything that one requires—requires to keep one even alive?" (He did not exactly stammer, but he spoke with a certain delicate hesitation, a sort of catch of horror in his voice.) "I don't believe their society was even select. I don't believe you always knew who it was you knew, you know."

Flashington had been waiting for an opportunity to give his views, which were spoken as they were created, and were given to his friends in the form of a pleasant stream of discursive chatter.

"Think of the suppers! How one would have reclined, after a warm bath, on a couch, wrapped in a soft cool garment, and crowned with flowers. Something like being in a glorified Turkish bath. There would be philosophers to talk and improve our minds, beautiful slaves to wait on us, and flute-players, and all that sort of thing. We should have

parties like the one in Plato's 'Symposium'; and some people would get rather excited with the wine, and then we should all talk about love, and death, and immortality, and politics, and scandal. Oh, *what* scandals they must have had in those days to talk about! Doesn't some one say somewhere that the suppers were like the 'wines' one has at college, only much more charming? I wonder if they were. And yet I think, on the whole, I prefer our modern ones; for at any rate we have 'fiz' and cards. I think one *must* have cards. To have nothing on but a cloak wrapped round you may be very poetic, but I prefer clothes that have some 'cut' about them—something to show that they come from a good tailor."

Darlington was neutral, having a pleasant sense that the present age is a very nice one, and that one generally managed to enjoy one's self wherever one was.

"Well," he said, "one gets plenty of fun out of things now, and I suppose one would have got plenty of fun then. If they had no cards, it didn't prevent them from gambling; and that's the great thing, after all. There was plenty of fighting. I

should have gone off to Britain on a grand tour. Nowadays every one knows everything about everywhere."

"Yes; and one could have had plenty of slaves," said Flashington, still wavering between the list of ancient and modern dissipations that was offered to him. "Why don't they revive the fashion of having slaves? If only some smart person would begin it, I am sure we could soon get the laws altered. I wonder if we shall ever have gladiators in the Albert Hall? It is such a pity that place should be so wasted; and the old arena must have been so exciting! I should have sat and looked on, while Claud—Claud would probably have been a persecuted Christian—was fighting with the wild beasts."

"You would certainly have been on the side of comfort and persecution," said Claud.

"Oh! I suppose I should have been a pagan," said Flashington, "before Constantine's time, or whoever it was who invented Christianity, — I mean, who invented it as an established religion that one could belong to."

"I wish we could persecute troublesome people

nowadays," said De Barry, looking up at a neighbouring hill, where there were already signs of a gigantic hotel in course of construction. "Just look there! Stoker, the great excursion man, has bought that hill, and is building a beastly great hotel to overlook this place. There's a nice prospect! We shall have three hundred brutes looking at us all day through opera glasses, just as though we were an exhibition; and the club will be ruined!"

"Let's go and 'rag' them," said Darlington.

But Flashington's extreme ingenuity in turning everything to his own advantage suggested even a better plan than this.

"Why shouldn't we throw open the club?" he said. "Set up tables, and make it another Monte Carlo. We could form a company, and be rich in no time. It's so absurd paying subscriptions to clubs instead of making money by them. Why, long ago, when I was at Eton, I lost a lot of money to a fellow in a bet. I got him elected to 'Pop,' and he was so grateful that he quite forgot the debt."

The last faint glow left by the passing day had now vanished, and the lights in the Forum shone out all the brighter for the surrounding darkness.

Our party, having finished dinner, were smoking and sipping their coffee, with their chairs pushed a little back, while they looked round at the occupants of the other tables. Claud's eyes happened to rest on a party of three seated at one of them. A handsome lady, who was neither exactly young nor middle-aged—perhaps the phrase "well preserved" would best describe her; and an inane-looking youth, with a vapid expression, and an occasional giggle at (what appeared to be) his own jokes, were opposite to him; and facing them, with her back to Claud, sat a young lady, who leaned slightly forward, and seemed to be rather listening to the conversation of the others than joining in it. She had at least a charming back, Claud thought. And as she moved her head, the light touched the edges of her auburn hair with gold.

"Who is that youth?" asked Darlington, looking towards the party that Claud was watching.

"Don't you know?" said De Barry. "I thought every one knew him. He's Tottie Fobbes."

"He looks an insufferable little noodle."

"Most people dislike him; but most people know him—they say he's such fun. He was too

wise to put up for this club; but he has come out with Lady Peterhouse, who is his aunt or something."

Tottie Fobbes was one of those people who could only have been produced during the last third of this century—a period which, if responsible for the theory of "the survival of the fittest," seems in practice to produce a larger supply than ever of the least fit, who not only exist but flourish on the very best that it has to offer. He had no mind, no intellect, and apparently no soul. When people said that he was "girlish-looking," they did not mean that he was pretty, but only that his face, being an utter negative, was sexless. There was a tradition in his family that he had once learnt to read and write (he had been too delicate, according to his mother, ever to go to school); but he seldom gave the world a chance of judging if this theory was anything more than a polite tradition. With no particular income of his own, and of course quite incapable of earning one, he fluttered about society, and lived on what is called "the fat of the land"—partly provided by his friends, and partly by confiding tradesmen; drew down the

blinds of his boudoir (boudoir being the only word which could adequately describe his sitting-room), and sat in the becoming light cast by pink shades over wax candles, while he entertained his friends at tea. He knew nothing but the latest scandal, which generally reappeared as the staple of his conversation in a deeply decorated and ominously heightened form. In fact, his power of making mischief was the only thing which prevented his being as contemptible as he was incapable, and which checked the pity one would otherwise feel for anything so effete.

"But who are the ladies?" asked Claud, still watching the movements of the little head that stood out so darkly against the candlelight on the table.

"That is Mrs Denbigh and her daughter. She—the mother—is rather a clever woman, and I suspect knows on which side her bread is buttered. The daughter is also clever, but is generally spoken of as being 'a strange girl'—chiefly, I should say, because she doesn't care much about the butter."

"She positively told me that she didn't care

about society, and that she preferred their place in Scotland to London in the season," said Flashington. "She is the sort of girl who suddenly asks you awkward questions. She once turned round to me at one of Lady Marlowe's evenings and said, 'Don't you think there is something a little contemptible about this? Here we are all priding ourselves on being superior people, because we have all been asked to meet one another.' Depend on it, she will marry an opera singer or a district visitor—some one whom she thinks is neglected by the world, but has a great soul."

"And what did you say?" asked Claud, a little impatiently.

"Oh, of course I took up the strain, and said what a good thing it would be if more people went as missionaries to feed the heathen."

Before Flashington had time to explain in what manner the heathen were to be fed by or with the missionaries, Darlington broke into the conversation, informing the others that she was a charming girl, could sing and dance capitally, and had all the right accomplishments for a young lady; but that, in addition to these, she could pull a boat, and fill

cartridges, and make herself generally useful to a fellow, as he expressed it.

"And I suppose she can bait a hook," said De Barry.

"I don't know; I never asked her," said Darlington, innocently. "I daresay she fishes in the sea."

"When one goes sea-fishing with ladies," remarked Claud, "I generally find that one has to bait the hook, and pay out the line, and feel it to see if there is *really* a fish on, and pull it up again if there is, and then take the fish off the hook, and finally persuade the lady not to throw it back again into the sea, because she thinks it is so cruel to keep the fish out of the water, and its death-struggles are so dreadful. Then she looks round triumphantly and says, 'Oh, look what a fish I've caught!'"

"When ladies fish metaphorically, I don't find that they require an equal amount of aid," De Barry suggested.

"I have never seen a lady fishing metaphorically," Darlington said, by way of conclusion; "but I am going to speak to the Denbighs. Come, Claud," he

added, getting up slowly and throwing away the end of his cigar; "if you like I will introduce you."

Mrs Denbigh was charmed to see Darlington, and asked him and Claud to sit down at her table. Tottie, taking no notice of the interruption, continued an account of his exploits in a country house that he had been lately staying at,—how, when every one was in the drawing-room after dinner, he had stolen a curled front from Mrs Fitz Peter's bedroom, a "dress-improver" from the room of another lady, as well as a dressing-gown from Mr Fitz Peter's dressing-room; how, arrayed in these, he had descended to the smoking-room, and had been received with shouts of laughter. But he forgot to add that he had only just escaped having his ears boxed by Mr Fitz Peter, and that his host had politely informed him next morning that there was a train to town at ten.

Claud was seated by Miss Denbigh, and only gave a languid attention to these details; for he was watching her face. Perhaps it was not round and plump enough to be perfectly beautiful. It seemed as though deep interests and high enthu-

siasms, a burning intellect and a restless spiritual energy, had refined the features and thinned the cheeks of everything that was superfluous to expression, and had left her soul free to shine forth through the almost transparent veil that it lit with its spirit. But if her face is not beautiful, he thought to himself, it is very interesting. It is better than beautiful; it is wonderful. It reminds one a little of some of Burne-Jones's paintings, only without the look they always have of dreary weariness.

At this moment the footlights on the stage at the end of the Forum were turned up. The Hungarian band in front of them began to tune up. There was a general rising from the tables, and every one began to take up the best positions they could find.

Mrs Denbigh rose. "They are going to play an opera bouffe—a company they have got over from Monte Carlo," she said.

Darlington, who loved comic opera, jumped up with alacrity, and the whole party moved off in the direction of the stage.

The piece was called 'La Princesse de Ravalenta

Arabica.' It was one of the latest examples of French comic opera, with the same conventional story that appears so often and in such very thin disguises—that begins in a village during the first act, meanders through the second act in a palace, only to vanish altogether in the third, before the arms (and legs) of young lady soldiers dressed in armour, and the limelight.

In the first act there was a rustic maiden (the programme called her "rustic"; but if the audience had depended on their eyes alone, it would not have been the adjective that suggested itself). She was betrothed to a young farmer; and, judging by the strains of the villagers, the curtain had had the felicity of rising on the very day when he was about to make her his bride.

No sooner, however, has the bride described her blushes in a waltz-song, than, in the midst of the "nuptial vows," horns are heard, pages enter, the centre of the stage is cleared, and the king of the country (played, of course, by the leading low comedian) enters, with a court of young ladies, who are attempting to play courtiers in hunting costume. He breaks into a long song, and describes how he

has been driven forth from his throne by his usurping brother.

He at once enlists the sympathy of the simple maiden, and both he and his court are thereupon disguised as farm-labourers. Of course there is now a grand soprano chorus of farm-labourers, represented by young ladies in the ordinary farmyard costume of tights and spangles. The usurping brother (a fat man, with a deep voice and a rolling eye) having opportunely arrived at the fortunate moment when the chorus are beginning, is naturally charmed. He drinks with the virtuous maiden; he still drinks; he does not recognise his brother, who is standing by in the thinnest of disguises, and who is making the broadest of jokes at his expense. Soon he not only drinks, but is drunk. Then the simple maiden locks him up in a hay-loft. The king throws off his disguise and proclaims himself, the people cheer, the chorus shout, the principal characters shuffle up and down the stage in a line, the limelight is turned on, the country is saved, and the curtain falls on the first act.

Every one spent the interval between the acts in asking their neighbours what they thought of it.

Mrs Leo, who had condescended to be present, said she did not like it as well as 'Lohengrin,' and that, if people must play second-rate operas, she wondered that they did not choose something a little better—'Don Giovanni,' for instance. For it must be remarked that Mrs Leo's detractors accused her, not only of having no tact, but added (which is almost worse) that she was totally devoid of any sense of humour. Not that this in itself would necessarily prevent her from enjoying an opera bouffe—quite the contrary—but it often saved her from understanding jokes which other and less fortunate people are forced to laugh at, and it enabled her to take certain things seriously that the rest of the world can only see the comic side of.

On the other side of the Forum a group of men were standing round an extremely pretty girl, who was amusing them all with an account of a "mixed school" to which she had been sent in her youth. She was noticeably vivacious; her eyes sparkled, and little smiles chased one another across her face as she spoke. At this moment she was telling them how she and the boys used to "toboggan" downstairs on tea-trays.

"You're so stiff in England," she went on, in her unconventional and yet not unladylike way. "You don't get any fun. At least you do, but we don't —I mean the girls don't. Fancy having to be at school with one's own sex only. Why, I've never been alone with my own sex for a day, except when I went into retreat once for two days."

"Into retreat?" one of the gentlemen murmured.

"Yes. You mightn't guess it, but I'm very High Church, you know. It's more select, my mother says. But I didn't stay in that retreat long; it was just like a convent. Some of us sat all day and thought of our sins; but most of us sat and wished we had any sins to think of." Then with a sudden change in her voice—"Is that the second act beginning? I don't think I shall stay."

"Not stay!" cried several voices.

"No. I think it horrid," she said, with a grave look in her face for a moment. And then as though she feared its attributes might be discussed, she suddenly smiled again, and said, "I want to go a little walk instead, down by the sea. I want you, Mr Smythe, to be kind enough to take me, because I want to ask you all about the aristocracy. And

they say you are a great authority on their manners and customs."

A slight smile went round the circle. Mr Smythe was not certain whether this remark was prompted by extreme ingenuousness, or whether its aim was satirical; but he promptly offered the fair American his arm. And as she moved away from the circle, her beautifully fitting Parisian dress making the faintest rustle, and her little head standing out in *piquant* shadow against her fluttering spangled fan, she was heard to murmur to her companion, "You really must teach me how to behave in the English manner. I'm sure I say the most dreadful things. And I may be a countess myself some day, you know."

The second act of the opera (which was now beginning) opens in the king's palace. The virtuous maiden is now a "court lady." Her lover is depressed and discontented, as he has not risen above being the shoeblack of the establishment. The grand chamberlain is discontented—everybody is discontented. There is a grand chorus of discontented pages, who suddenly cloak themselves, and so become conspirators at once. The usurping

brother (having, it is presumed, slept off the effect of the cider) most fortunately turns up at this very moment. Of course a grand conspiring chorus must follow—when, in the midst of it, the simple maiden rushes in. She threatens to denounce them; but the usurping *bass* tells her that he loves her madly, and will marry her if she will only join them. This is too much for the light tenor person. He rushes off and informs the king of the plot. The conspirators are surprised, surrounded, and every one suddenly, at the same moment, and apparently from the same motive, bursts into a wild dance of defiance, which continues till the descent of the curtain obliterates it.

The third act, which appears to be weaker in plot than in spectacle, opens in a camp. The chorus of young ladies reappear, dressed (perhaps if anything a little less, rather than more) like soldiers. The virtuous maiden appears dressed as a soldier—so does the weak tenor; and they break into a duet, which is not interrupted by the evolutions of the army behind them. There is nothing to show who is fighting against whom, or to whom the camp belongs. The plot has apparently come to an

untimely end (as is often the case in the last act of comic operas); and in compensation, everybody comes on in military dress, perhaps to finish up the piece with military honours. Then there is a chorus about nothing in particular; and all of a sudden the simple maiden throws herself into the arms of the light tenor, the usurping duke into the arms of the simple maiden's mother, the king into the arms of his wife, the soldiers into the arms of the rustic maidens when there are any—when there are none, into one another's—and (probably because the authors now think they have fooled long enough) the curtain comes down, and all is over.

At the end of the second act Miss Denbigh had looked longingly out across the broad smooth distances of water, here and there touched by a sparkle as the foam which edged the little waves was caught for a moment in the moonlight.

Her thoughts had wandered far across the sea, to other climes and distant ages, vaguely mingling with imagined pictures of the long-forgotten past. For across these very seas the glad young Greeks had sailed from their dear country—their sanguine

faces and ardent hearts overflowing with hope and joy, and love and friendship, in the boyhood of the world. Then the stern Roman came, with steadfast eye and iron will. The dark and subtle Carthaginian passed—and passed—and was no more. Tall barbarians from the far grey North—fair Normans with violet eyes and golden curls—swept over the seas, conquering. But time went on; and the ships which sailed to the golden East carried gay Crusaders, fired by religion and filled with adventurous delight, their dainty armour glittering in the sunshine, and each with the crimson cross of Christ upon his breast. And then the waves bore northward the fiery Moor, who brought from the sad desert his burning crescent and his canvas home, nightly moving, and yet none the less his loved abode. So passed the centuries. Greek pirates, merchants, then noble ships, and flying steamers came and went—still come and go; while the waves and the sky change ever, and yet alone are eternally the same.

Thus Miss Denbigh let her thoughts play lightly among the centuries, until she suddenly recalled Thackeray's ballad, "In the Bay of Biscay." And

at the remembrance of that most realistic epic of the sea, she awoke from her dream with a little laugh, and suggested that they should go out for a row upon the sea.

Claud jumped up in a moment. Would they come? he asked them. He did not think that Mrs Denbigh would feel cold on the water, and he should be delighted to give them a pull. Mrs Denbigh felt inclined to go, but suggested that they would want a *cox;* and Tottie being worse than useless in a boat, she evidently expected Darlington to proffer his aid. But before either that young gentleman could speak, or Claud had time to persuade them that no *cox* was necessary, Miss Denbigh assured them that she could and would *cox*. A boat was soon found. Darlington and Tottie strolled down to see them off, and to carry the usual number of wraps. Tottie blew kisses after them, and screamed out, "Take me in your boat, love," as they gently floated away from the lighted steps; and then he and Darlington went back to see the third act of the opera.

CHAPTER IV.

After the opera was over, Darlington looked vaguely round with the intention of finding some one to play pyramids with. But before he had succeeded in doing this, he was suddenly addressed from behind by a rather more than middle-aged young lady, with that peculiarly brisk manner and determined air which proclaim that their possessor has outlived her illusions. This lady nevertheless still had one left; for in her early youth she had heard some mistaken person call her very pretty, and she had ever since naturally laboured under the delusion that she was extremely beautiful. It was not a beauty to which she made any concessions, however,—she was too strong-minded for that. Her mechanically smooth dark hair was parted in the exact centre, and brushed with mathematical

neatness on either side, away from what she would probably call her temples. Her dress, though neat, was constructed on strictly business-like principles, and her whole appearance was painfully neat and slightly forbidding. So that Darlington, as he looked at her, thought, "Here's a go!"

"Excuse me," she said in a firm high voice; "Lord Darlington, I think. I really must introduce myself to you, I am such an old friend of your father's. My name is Miss Rattletuba. Perhaps your father has mentioned my name to you. He was kind enough to speak very highly of some little essays of mine on social subjects, called 'Jinglings of a Chatelaine.'"

Now she was one of those people who are called "strong-minded," not because their minds are particularly strong, but because they form an aggressive and unalterable opinion, immediately and for ever, upon every subject, small and great, entirely irrespective of their own knowledge or other people's feelings. And Darlington, who had no curiosity about eccentric human types and interesting varieties of personality, and who merely knew that he had never met such a person before, and hoped

never to meet such a person again, was simply filled with a desire to get rid of her. He therefore murmured something that was intended as an acquiescence, and giggled a little to himself as he wondered what his "governor's" opinion of the lady must be.

But to Miss Rattletubs the conversation was only just beginning. "I saw in one of those horrid Society papers that your father was suffering from an attack of gout. I'm sure I don't know which of them it was. I hardly ever read them myself, and I'm told they contain the most dreadful scandals."

"One sees where one's friends are staying, you know."

"My friends are chiefly among the workers—the people who are trying to regenerate Society. They say that this sort of thing can't last much longer." Miss Rattletubs, like most of the people who are great at generalities, adopted the plan of frequently putting a "they say" at the beginning of her statements. "I am myself writing a series of letters to a brother about all this sort of thing from a worker's point of view. I hope to collect them and publish them under the title

of 'Letters to a Brother, from a Sufferer in the South.'"

Now Darlington, who had been brought up among the upper classes, and who had never met a leading "intellectual worker," much less a live authoress, before in his life (if we except Mrs Leo), naturally felt somewhat awed and impressed. He thought, as we probably all do the first time we meet an authoress—"Dear me, I wonder if she'll put me in her next book. And if she does, whatever will she say about me?"

"I'm so busy with one scheme and another," Miss Rattletubs breathlessly continued; she was extremely "in earnest" about everything. She hated above all things what she called "lukewarmers," and was always taking up new schemes, (which ranged from "whole-meal bread" to "ribbon movements,") in order to regenerate mankind. "I've just started the pink and green ribbon movement. You wear the pink ribbon if you don't smoke between meals, the green if you don't smoke during meals, and both if you don't smoke at all. Now I think I can persuade you to try the green, at any rate."

"It's awfully kind of you. But, you know, I'm afraid I should look such a fool with it. Besides, you know" (and this was a happy thought), "it wouldn't be quite true, because I do sometimes smoke at meals." And then Darlington, looking round in a helpless way for a subject with which to make a conversational diversion, suddenly saw the young lady who had taken Mr Smythe for a walk. She was standing a little apart, talking with great vivacity to an elderly gentleman, and shading her face from the light with a big red fan covered with little twinkling spangles. She looked — standing there in a French dress, which, although extremely fashionably made, was a little *bizarre*—like a picture by one of the newest school of French painters; for she almost always represented "an effect," and formed the very beau ideal of an *impression*.

"Who is that girl—over there?" asked Darlington, bluntly.

"That Frenchy-looking girl? Oh, she's Miss van Knut, an American. And that's her father. He's immensely rich, they say. He got the contract for an overhead sewer in New York. It didn't somehow give general satisfaction, they say——"

"Perhaps it leaked on people's heads," put in Darlington.

"——And, I believe, has since been abandoned. But he made his 'pile' out of it. She's good-natured, but frivolous. I should think she has had no 'bringing-up' worth speaking of. And then she spoils her forehead with one of those 'idiot fringes.'"

"I thought everybody—most girls, I mean—had them."

"Not really nice girls—really simple nice girls. They used to be considered quite fast, and now they are so common and vulgar. The 'coming woman' won't have anything of that sort."

"Well, you see, the 'coming woman'—if she's coming—can't have come, so we needn't trouble about her," said Darlington, who was almost being irritated into epigram.

"There will soon be a very different sort of people. There won't be room for many stragglers in the fight of life much longer. I daresay you haven't ever thought about it, because you've probably been brought up at Eton and Oxford, or somewhere like that. They don't realise the tendency of the age, because they're almost played out them-

selves. They say that the Victoria University is quite taking the place of Oxford. And there's a school up in Yorkshire somewhere—I quite forget where—which, they say, will be better than Eton in a year or two,—the highest tone, and all the masters advanced thinkers."

"What a beastly hole, and what a brute of a woman!" thought Darlington.

His thoughts must be forgiven, as he did not give them utterance; and it must also be remembered that his vocabulary of abusive adjectives was not chosen with critical nicety, but was both limited and formed by careless usage. His contribution to a conversation was at all times more or less of a monosyllabic character, although atoned for by a charmingly responsive smile. Now, as he murmured something about Harrow being good enough for him, even the smile was wanting. Then he suddenly added, "I'm very sorry,—I must be off; some fellows are waiting for me;" and betook himself off accordingly.

Meanwhile the little boat was slowly floating seawards. Claud pulled as gently as he could; and finally, when they had got out about a quarter of a

mile, he rested on his oars altogether. The conversation was taken up in fits and starts, and then dropped again, as though it were hardly worth while to talk when there was so much around to silently enjoy. At last, after a longer pause than usual, Claud pointed out to them Pompeii in the distance. It looked more lovely than usual this evening. The magic touch of the moonlight had removed every trace of newness and garishness. Lines of little twinkling stars marked the streets, and threw a hot faint light upon the pillars and porticoes of the classical houses and tiny temples among which they crept along.

"How much more beautiful it is now than by daylight!" said Miss Denbigh. "By daylight I think it all looks a little sham and tawdry, but now—why, even Venice can't be more lovely."

"Yes, it is a little like Venice — at least as Venice looks sometimes," said Claud. "Last time I was there, however, it was foggy, and raining the whole time. I had nothing to do but to stay in my hotel and read 'The Stones of Venice' and write sonnets to the weather."

"Do you write poetry much?" asked Mrs Den-

bigh, quickly. She thought to herself that it was a pity when young men took to spending a great deal of time in that way. If they were real poets, perhaps it could not be helped, many things having to be excused and put up with in one of these uncomfortable people. But, as a general rule, she considered it should be discouraged. It had an enervating effect on the character, and tended to confuse the real issues of life with false standards and misleading ideals.

Claud did not know what was passing through her mind, and he answered, innocently enough, "Oh no; never anything to be called poetry. Sometimes, when I have nothing better to do, I try to pump out some verses, just for practice; but you may be sure I never bore my friends with them."

"We are quite sure of that," put in Mrs Denbigh, with her ready tact. "But that need not prevent you repeating some of them to us."

"Yes; please do," added Miss Denbigh.

Claud, of course, protested that he really couldn't—that he would if he could, but that he had really forgotten everything. He retreated from one outpost of excuse to another, as a young

man generally does when he is pressed to do anything which makes him feel shy. And he surrendered at last (as they generally do) with a feeling of half-conscious pleasure after all.

"Well," he said, "the only thing I know is a sonnet on the weather at Venice I told you about. I sent it to the 'Spectator,' but they wouldn't put it in. So I daresay it is very bad:—

"Across the grey sea drifts the cold grey rain;
The palaces are veiled in grey; and all
The city seems as though a second fall
Had driven forth mankind with sword of flame.
St Mark's is masked in scaffolds, which proclaim
Its downfall and its doom; while Nature's pall,
Deepening, descends. The campanile tall
Towers in the mist. A wavering shadowy stain,
Deserted, is the Grand Canal's wide stream:
No boats among the bridges glide between:
Even as of the dead, these waters seem.
Ah no! man is not dead. His latest scheme
For joy in Venice comes. As in a dream,
We see the passing steamboat's lurid gleam."

"Oh, I like it! I think it charming," said Mrs Denbigh, when Claud had finished and had asked her whether she did not think it a little pessimistic. "But," she added, "why do you put in the word 'grey' three times in the first two lines?"

"Because the whole thing is a sort of arrangement in grey. The aspect of Venice changes daily. There is no place in the world which loses all colour so quickly when the weather is dull or wet. And, you know, there is no place which glows with such exquisite tints in certain hours of sunshine."

"Please don't tell me you paint as well as write poetry," Mrs Denbigh said, in playful alarm, "or we matter-of-fact people shall be quite afraid to know you."

"Oh no, I don't paint at all. Indeed I hardly ever write any poetry either. I'm fond of literature and everything else that is nice. But nowadays I am mostly taken up with my profession."

"And that is?"

"The Bar."

"But you are not at the Bar *now?*" suggested Mrs Denbigh, with the slightest touch of playful satire in her voice.

"Not at the present moment. I'm taking a little holiday." Then Mrs Denbigh gave him her views on the Bar as a profession. She was a clever woman, and her views on most subjects were not to be despised. She told him that she had often

met eminent lawyers in society during the course of her life, and had also known many young men in society who had adopted the Bar as a profession, but they were never *the same.* And she suspected that the eminent lawyers, when they were young men, might have been found working ten or twelve hours a-day in back chambers, up four or five flights of stairs, somewhere in Lincoln's Inn.

She gave him her views with a certain insistance, which made Claud wonder whether she wished him to tell her his motives in choosing a profession. He could not, however, state that he was regarded as his uncle's heir, as far as a large part of his personality went, so he contented himself by saying, "I went to the Bar chiefly to please my uncle, Lord St Kevan. I think he considers it a good step towards a political career."

Mrs Denbigh turned the conversation, — she began to talk about Darlington, and filled Claud with delight by praising him so generously. He was such a satisfactory young man, so good to his mother, and so popular in his county. He would probably stand at the next election.

"Yes, I believe it is fixed," burst in Claud, "and

I am to go down and help him to kiss the babies, and all that sort of thing."

During this conversation Miss Denbigh had been very silent. Her thoughts had been far away—rambling over Scotch moors, wet with the falling mist and covered with watery bloom. Suddenly she said—

"I don't like 'smart people.'"

"Claudia!" said her mother.

"Well, perhaps it's the phrase I dislike. As far as I can tell, you may be well-born, good-looking, and well-bred; yet if you happen not to be in the 'smart set,' you are called second-rate. Whereas, on the other hand, you may be ugly, ill-bred, and rude; your father may have been a drunken money-lender or worse: but if you happen to have succeeded in wriggling yourself into the 'smart set,' you become a privileged person, and can look down on and snub every one else."

"But we are in the 'smart set,'" said Mrs Denbigh.

"I was only speaking about the general principle. It made me so indignant at dinner to hear Tottie Fobbes say, 'A fellow had the cheek to in-

troduce me to Lord Mawnan. How can I possibly know him! He must be very second-rate, for I never meet him at any of the *best* houses.'"

"Yes, Tottie takes himself a little too seriously sometimes," said Mrs Denbigh. "You would never find a real man of the world—like Mr de Barry, for instance—talk like that."

"The idea," put in Claud, indignantly, "of a little insignificant creature like that presuming to patronise a man in Lord Mawnan's position, because he happens not to care to go to a few houses in which Tottie has managed to show himself! Why, Lord Mawnan is twice his age, has ten times his position, fifty times his experience, probably five hundred times his brains, and could kick him out of anywhere in no time."

Miss Denbigh flashed over Claud a smile of approval, and then said—

"You must admit that in society people consider that they belong to a privileged class. They may not use their privilege, but they consider that they have the right to do many things that they would not venture on if they were not in society—the right, for instance, of being extremely eccentric, or

overbearing, or capricious, or unbearably rude, to people who are not in their set."

"Come, Claudia," said Mrs Denbigh, with the slightest touch of warning in her voice, "you must not be uncharitable; and you must also remember that all the best people are in society, even if a few ill-bred people manage to clamber into it, and misbehave themselves there."

She remembered the day—of course Claudia was too young to do so—when she herself was not quite, *quite* in the smartest set. And though she had always been a woman of too much dignity, and with too broad a view of the relative value of things, ever positively to struggle or intrigue, she had brought her diplomacy (of which she had a large store) to bear upon any doubtful or antipathetic forces, until she had perfectly gained her end. Social position had never presented itself in so crude a form as a ladder, but to her it had been a gently inclined plane, up which she had enjoyed moving.

After this accomplishment, she did not cherish her conquest in proportion to the pains she had spent in bringing it about (as most women—and,

indeed, many men—are found to do). In fact, she despised it a little in her heart. She quite sympathised with her daughter in her outburst; but she thought that lately her daughter had acquired strange socialistic ideas, and that they had better be checked as soon as possible. One of her hopes had long been that perhaps Darlington might propose for her hand. Mrs Denbigh not only liked him for his position, but also for himself; his charming face and frank boyish manner had a way of unconsciously insinuating themselves into most ladies' hearts. And now she wondered if Claud could be kept at a safe distance. All this, put down, perhaps a little crudely, in black and white, would lead one to suppose that Mrs Denbigh was merely an intriguing woman of the world. It was not really so, however. She had the kindest heart; and if she had her plans, what clever woman with few illusions, broad decided views, and a considerable natural power of getting them accepted, has not? She now, for instance, determined that they had been out long enough, and so the boat was turned towards the shore. As Claud was pulling them in, she asked him one or

two more "leading questions" about his future career. Claud answered them, and then suddenly gave a little laugh.

"I am only laughing at my thoughts," he said, when Mrs Denbigh asked him if she were not horribly inquisitive.

The thought that had suddenly struck him as so ludicrous was the idea that Mrs Denbigh had absolutely taken alarm, and feared that he might fall in love with her daughter.

"How absurd women are," he said to himself, "to imagine such preposterous things!" And then he gave another little laugh, for at that moment the veil was lifted. He felt Love's golden arrow in his heart, as a blinding wave of seemingly mingling colour, music, incense, light, and bliss, swept over him. And he murmured to himself, "By Jove, I think she is right!" with a little rapturous flutter of perfect happiness.

CHAPTER V.

THE rain was pouring down. Dark clouds came sweeping over the tormented sea, scudding from the south, where their advent was lost in one obliterating sheet of grey pallor. The Forum was deserted; it was slowly transforming itself into a pool. Little streams of rain raced off the houses into the streets, and helped to swell the rivulet which each one had started on its own account.

The lashing wind blew in gusts, hurling the rain into the face of any one who was bold enough to venture, even with hurrying feet, from one building to another.

Most of the people were huddled together in one or other of the public rooms; but they were cold, and bored, and extremely cross. Many of the rooms themselves were not only damp, but were positively

sloppy; and draughts, which in this case were violent gusts of wind, abounded.

Miss van Knut, after undergoing, as she herself said, the slow water-torture for some time—a drop of rain having fallen on her head every two minutes—proposed a warming game. Some one suggested a "tug of war," and the party were soon in the midst of England against the world.

"Have you heard that Cade is coming in a day or two?" said Mr Giles to Mr Leo, as they were standing watching the fun.

"Really, I shouldn't have thought this sort of thing was at all in his line. Is he interested in classical revivals?"

"No; but he likes enjoying himself as well as any one else. He is very fond of the good things of this life—very. He doesn't himself really hate the rich. He is only, rightly, envious of their privileges."

"Then his professing to do so is merely a policy?"

"Yes—part of his policy as a popular leader. You must do that sort of thing nowadays."

"But I always thought that as the Government became increasingly democratic, its leaders would also become more disinterested."

"It's no good being theoretical nowadays. You have to be practical if you want to succeed; and if you want to succeed in politics, you mustn't be too squeamish about the means. That's how Cade got on. You don't suppose he has risen to the Cabinet, from being a temperance lecturer, merely by patriotism and disinterested statesmanship! I believe that the chief reason he is coming here is to meet Courier, the great French Radical. I don't know much about him. I fancy he's not a bit stronger than Cade in his views. But the French have never let him get into their Government. They're so retrograde, after all. They are really much more reactionary than we are."

"Courier," said Mr Leo, in his gently authoritative manner, "is, I think, a very dangerous man. He is an unpractical dreamer—a Girondist. Like Rousseau, he believes that the ideal state is a state of nature, with apparently few laws, either civil or even moral. He thinks that if we obtained this state we should all be innocent and happy and beautiful—indeed ideally Hellenic. But here I, like most of the thinkers of the present day, differ from him. We must progress; we cannot retrace our steps."

"I'm afraid I must be off," said Mr Giles. "I do the practical parts, you know, and I've a lot of 'wires' to send off to our Hundreds about autonomy for India. We're getting up public opinion on that subject now. Cade's full of it, and I have to work the machine for him."

"And I must be off, to read some of the 'Vita Nuova' to my wife; so good-bye for the present."

"He's a rum chap," said Giles to himself, as Leo walked away — "with his idealisms, and patriotisms, and laws of nature, and all that sort of unpractical wind-talk. Well, well, I suppose it all helps the party; and it gives it a kind of pleasant face, at any rate."

Lady Marlowe had provided a charming sitting-room for herself. She had insisted on the architects giving her a good stove; and now she was, as one might say, hugging herself over it with a certain satisfaction. The room was filled with photograph-stands, Japanese screens, old bits of brocade, and various other knick-knacks, which contrasted strangely with the classically frescoed walls.

"Yes," she used to say, whenever Mr Leo sighed over the anachronisms, "it is a jumble, I know; but

all modern art is. I'm going to have Sargent's portrait of me put on an easel in that corner, and then I'm sure the broadest eclecticism can't go further than that."

Lady Marlowe was not, however, at the present moment entertaining Mr Leo, for Mrs Denbigh was seated on the other side of the stove, and had come in to enjoy an "intimate" talk, as the French say, about her daughter. Although well-born and with an adequate income, Mrs Denbigh had always found that a certain amount of enterprise was necessary in order to maintain the very satisfactory position in which she found herself. But Claudia did not realise this. To her the position, with all the delights with which it was accompanied, came as a matter of course—as a dispensation of nature; and she frankly accepted it as such. Mrs Denbigh was really pleased at this. Nothing, she would have considered, was a greater sign of bad breeding than that her daughter should have imagined that they were in any way privileged, or that there was anything to be particularly gratified at in their social position. And yet, although she hated a worldly girl, she began to fear that perhaps

Claudia was getting a little too unworldly. Claudia thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated the good things of this life; but she preferred others still more. She would rather be hunting in Wiltshire during the winter than spending it on the Riviera, for instance; and she often bemoaned having to go up to London for the season, instead of enjoying herself, as she çalled it, in Scotland.

"If we could only miss a season or two, mother, no one would miss us, and we should have so much more fun in the country." Now Mrs Denbigh, though sure of the first statement, was not so sure of the second; and the whole idea filled her with a certain vague alarm. She thought that for a carefully brought-up girl—for her own daughter, in fact—the whole speech had a strange unnatural ring about it. Claudia had also taken to expending a great deal of time over "improving books." She not only puzzled out her Dante with the help of an Italian dictionary, but she had even begun to dip into Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Mrs Denbigh had the greatest belief in a woman being clever, intelligent, and well-read; but she drew the line at Herbert Spencer. So now she had

come to have a little talk with Lady Marlowe, in order to discuss the great question of the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of young girls in general, and those of her own daughter in particular.

"Claudia," she was saying, "is too much wrapped up in her own ideas. She sits and dreams all day over a book—not a novel, or even poetry, but social philosophy, or something of that sort. The other day I found her reading that awful 'Progress and Poverty'; but at any rate, I put a stop to that."

"Let her have more society and gaiety. Girls in the midst of pleasant action never retain theoretical ideas long. It is, after all, a form of enthusiasm; and when she is happily settled in life, her husband will take care that she isn't too transcendental. I'm sure Sir George never gives me a moment's peace to try and improve my mind. He seems to expect me to spend the whole day over the household accounts. If I am to do nothing else but look after the house, as I often say to him, what time is there to study esoteric Buddhism?"

"Oh, please don't talk to her about that!" said Mrs Denbigh, in alarm. "You can study such

things and keep your head, because people like us, who have been in the world a little longer, know that it is all very pretty, but that it is only a passing fashion. But Claudia is carried away by what she reads and believes in; and I am now in daily terror of her suddenly announcing that she is a Buddhist, or a Theosophist, or a Socialist, or something dreadful."

Lady Marlowe, for her own part, thought that it would be both original and charming to have a daughter with "dreadful" views. Mrs Denbigh had a narrower ideal for a young lady. "Good form" (she did not call it by that name) was her criterion, and anything in the least original or *outré* she considered was most unladylike.

"If your daughter cares for politicians, I have got two coming in a day or two. Courier, the French Radical, and Cade — they want to meet one another, and so I asked them both here," said Lady Marlowe, taking a tack in the conversation.

"Cade coming *here* to stay with you! I always thought you were a Conservative; and even if you are a Liberal, how can you have anything to do with that dreadful man?"

"I'm a great Conservative; I'm on the Council of the Primrose League. But for that very reason I think it is politic to be friendly with the foe. One can fight them so much better if one has personally studied their weak points." (The real reason that Lady Marlowe encouraged Mr Cade was that he was very successful; and she worshipped success, as a general rule, irrespective of its merits or results.) "Besides, he is personally quite a nice person; and one must always separate the man from the politician."

"I have always considered him one of the worst and wickedest people going," said Mrs Denbigh, in her firmest accents—"not so much on account of the nature of his acts, as on account of their widespread influence. As far as this goes—and it goes very far—it is tending to ruin the country; indeed I daresay he will succeed in partly ruining it."

"Oh, come!" said Lady Marlowe, in her light staccato way; "he isn't nearly so bad as you make out. He is very good company, and I assure you doesn't mean half that he says. We must try not to be narrow-minded, you know, in this cosmopolitan age."

Before Mrs Denbigh had had time to reply, a knock was heard at the door, and Flashington burst in. He had come, he said, to try and find Miss Denbigh. They were going to get up a four at lawn-tennis, as the weather had cleared up a little. Claudia was soon found in Mrs Denbigh's rooms. She and Flashington walked down to the courts together, which were already filling up, as ragged gleams of sunshine (with the sudden warmth that sunshine always seems to bring with it in the South) began to break through the clouds in glaring jagged rents, edging them, by contrast, with lines of crumpled darkness. The wind had dropped, the rain had ceased. "In half an hour," said Flashington, "it will have turned out quite a beautiful day. The court will be disengaged in a few minutes." And then he told her that the other two players he had asked were Darlington and Miss van Knut.

Darlington was already on the ground, looking more boyish than ever in his flannels. In a minute or two Miss van Knut was seen walking slowly towards them, swinging her racket, and dressed in a costume which here and there gave out a little

sparkle, as though the light in her eyes had overflowed and been deftly caught among its folds and trimmings. Flashington introduced Darlington to her. She flushed for a moment with pleasure, and then said eagerly, but with the most absolute simplicity—

"I'm so glad to meet you, Lord Darlington, because, do you know, I've never spoken to a real peer before."

"But I'm not a peer," said Darlington, beginning to get a little embarrassed—at the same time giving her the winning smile with which he always carried off his embarrassments so successfully.

"Then at any rate you're a legislator, and sit in the House of Lords. I've been so carefully brought up, that I've never been allowed to speak to a legislator before. In America the high-toned families don't generally associate with them."

"But I don't sit in the House of Lords; and I hope it will be a long time before I do. They say it's awfully dull there. I'm going to try and get into the Commons next election."

"And of course you're a great Tory?"

"No, I'm a Liberal. All our family are, you know."

"You don't look as though you'd studied politics much. You look too young and too fresh, too——"

"Innocent," suggested Flashington.

"Yes, that sort of thing—too nice, in fact. Though I'm sure I oughtn't to say so. You should just see our politicians. They aren't too innocent or too nice. But how shall you know what to vote for?"

"The 'gov.' will tell me. Sometimes one's constituents have ideas on the subject. And then," added Darlington, in his most ingenuous and charmingly boyish way, "I've got some ideas of my own, you know."

At this moment Mr Smythe was seen deliberately approaching. He was a little short-sighted, and did not recognise any one as yet.

"I don't like that man," said Miss van Knut in a quick whisper. "I'm sure he's an awful snob. We have snobs in America, but we couldn't produce anything so perfect as that."

"That's why he's got on so well. They say he began life in a cheesemonger's. But our courts are ready now," added Flashington in a louder voice.

Mr Smythe now came up and gave the party a smile.

"We are going to play together," said Darlington to Miss van Knut.

"I think so; but I play so badly, you will have to take all the balls," she said. And then turning to Mr Smythe with a wicked twinkle in her eyes, she added, "I shan't have to trouble you to give me any more lessons in the deportment of the aristocracy, Mr Smythe, because Lord Darlington has kindly promised to give them to me himself for the future. Haven't you, Lord Darlington?"

"Rather," said Darlington with a delighted giggle, as they took up their places for the game.

Mr Smythe, for once in his life, was staggered. He was accustomed to put up with snubs and rebuffs—at least from the right people. But he considered that he had never in his whole life met with such a mixture of impudence and effrontery—such a barefaced and shameless attempt to secure a desirable young man, combined with such an impudent snub for himself. He would have been the last person to understand that such an idea as "securing" Darlington had never entered Miss van Knut's head; that the amount of amusement she derived from a person was generally the test of

whether she wanted to know them well or not; and that, with her frank simplicity of character, when she liked any one she showed that she liked them —indeed she was capable of even telling them so. If she had thought that people would be inclined to suspect her motives, she would at first have been incredulous, and then indignant.

"I never heard anything so uncharitable and horrid," she would have probably said, and at once have gone and told Darlington that she could never speak to him again.

"I must really go and warn some of the ladies, and write to Darlington's mother at once," said Mr Smythe to himself. "Dear Lady Downstreamdown would never forgive me if anything fatal happened to her son."

And Claud, where was Claud all this time? If he were in love, why—even if he were left out of the tennis set—was he not lingering round the courts; or at least combining business with pleasure, by giving Mrs Denbigh a little of his company?

Claud at this moment was taking a long walk by himself, up among the hills. He walked on

quickly. He told himself that he wanted to have a quiet time to think things over; but in reality he tried, by such mild violence as the exercise of walking gives, to escape from thought.

He was in love, and he knew it.

During the last few days he had moved, as it were, in an atmosphere lightened and rarefied by a new joy. He seemed to have been led away from the sordid world by the dreaming and passionate Love-god himself—the brows of the amorous boy crowned with myrtle, his grey eyes filled with a wistful exultation. Upwards and onwards they seemed to pass, till they almost floated among the peaks of virgin whiteness—in a world which we know not, fashioned as it is by lovers' hopes and dreams and whispers. And then, amid the rosy dawn-clouds, the young god spread his shimmering wings. And the air was filled with her presence—the presence of the one whom he loved. And her face smiled on him, while his blood danced through his veins, and he counted unconsciously the beating of his own exultant heart.

Everything around him was touched by change, was glorified and vivified, and, in a subtle way,

almost transformed for him—the small things of life as well as the greater ones.

The flowers, for instance, that came with so fresh a glow in the early morning—the distant strains of music from the shore, almost too honey-like in their sweet, long-drawn-out Italian melody—the faint smell of orange-blossom that always pervaded the place—the hills, the waves, the very people themselves, and the full-toned life around,—were partly effaced, partly lit up by the luminous glow of his love.

And yet he tried to evade the belief, and persuade himself that he was only possessed by a passing fancy.

During the last few days he had often waited feverishly for hours with the hope of exchanging a few words with her, or even getting a passing smile; and then when the supreme moment came, he found that he had nothing to say, or worse than nothing. For words that did not rise to the occasion, he felt, simply mocked and insulted it.

They had had several small talks. He believed they talked chiefly about the weather. And when they had finished, he had cried to himself, "I am

not in love — I cannot be in love!" till the old irresistible, haunting, irrevocable feeling gathered over him once more.

Claud had a considerable amount of common-sense; and sometimes, when he was prepared to admit to himself that he was in love, his sense of humour even came to the surface, and helped to present a new series of pictures to his brain. He saw his uncle's look of wonder; he heard the sarcastic question as to how he proposed to support a wife. He heard Mrs Denbigh asking the same question with surprising clearness. But he did not hear himself giving an equally satisfactory reply.

"I can't marry, and that is the long and the short of it," he said to himself. He did not of course convince himself (does a lover ever do so?), but he continued, "I must cure myself. I'm in the most absurd state. I feel just like Dante when he wrote the 'Vita Nuova'; and, as Darlington would say, I never thought I should make such a beastly fool of myself as *that*."

He threw himself down on some grass which had been partly sheltered by overhanging trees from the storm of the morning; and then, slowly

stretching out his legs, he gazed across the distance, beneath an arch of trellised vine, to the expanses of the sweeping sea. He lit his pipe. The afternoon was warm and very calm—his body was a little weary with its climb.

"I am in love," he said. And as he did so, he gave a tiny smile—and was asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Government, at the time of which we are writing, although they might have lost a little of their originally overwhelming prestige, were still as firmly fixed in office as ever; and the Opposition saw no chance of either defeating them by a vote of censure, or of securing a majority if there were to be a dissolution.

It is true that there were ex-members of the Cabinet itself who said that it had committed robbery, condoned treason, and commanded murder.

The Ministry had forfeited one of these members by bringing in a bill which was simply a form of legalised theft; had forced another to retire, rather than encourage disloyalty and form compacts with traitors; and a third to resign when they began to

bombard the port of a friendly Power without any declaration of war.

But so strange are the English people at times, that these little incidents hardly affected the popularity of the Cabinet—or what remained of it.

"Not until the whole Cabinet have resigned" (it is presumed through their distaste for assisting any longer in a Government of failure and disgrace) "shall we really know or realise the unequalled strength of the Prime Minister," some of his more devoted followers were wont to exclaim—and it really seemed as though the country agreed with them.

(The reader must remember, in justice to the novelist, that it is his business not only to describe, but also to create; and that therefore, if he mention, as though they were facts, things not merely contrary to all experience, but almost incredible in themselves, it should be ascribed to inexperience, and not be condemned as a childish attempt at deception. Indeed, is it wonderful that, when he has so often been told that "fact is stranger than fiction," he should have, for once, exceeded the credible, and made fiction stranger than fact?)

After this, it will probably be impossible to astonish the reader—even when he is told that our (fictitious) Prime Minister was a Liberal, and is assured that Mr Cade was a member of our (supposititious) Cabinet.

At the present moment, Parliament had adjourned for the Easter recess, and thus Mr Cade was enabled to become a guest of Lady Marlowe's. Lord St Kevan had also arrived, and had shown by his manner to Claud that he had not yet forgiven his desertion. He was too magnanimous, too much the *grand seigneur*, to harbour any petty spite or to cease for a moment to be as exquisitely courteous as ever. But, on the other hand, he was accustomed to be obeyed, and now showed in his intercourse with Claud the very slightest shade of stiffness. His manners were very elaborate, and included many delicate shades among them—and he seemed to be waiting, with well-bred patience, for his nephew to rearrange his views, until they coincided with his own.

For a day or two neither of them touched on the dangerous topic. But one morning, when they were walking along the seashore, away from Pom-

peii, Lord St Kevan suddenly began, in his slow, deliberate, senatorial voice—

"I have been thinking over what you told me about your desire to change your principles" (he would not for a moment admit that his nephew could already have permitted the change to take place). "Do you not see that although there is much that is accomplished by a Liberal Government nowadays of which we cannot approve, yet if we, as an order, were to go over to the other side, things would probably become much worse? We should lose our controlling—our restraining—influence——"

"But you don't control—you can't restrain; that is just my point," broke in Claud—forgetting in his eagerness that his uncle had been born in days when peers were not accustomed to be interrupted, whatever they might say. "You allow the Radicals to outweigh the whole party, and then you throw your weight into their scale. Now, if you want to balance them, I think it would be more logical to throw it into the other one."

The old man seemed to take no notice of the interruption; and he continued, with his air of

gentle dignity, as though Claud were still a child, and he were trying to convince him of an error, instead of punishing him for it—

"I think you underestimate the Whig influence. It would be impossible to form a Government without a large, I may say a preponderating, Whig element in it."

"At the present moment, possibly, but not for long," replied Claud, still unconvinced—still almost unabashed. "The Radicals openly scoff at the Whigs. You know they do. They say, if the Whigs choose to help them, well and good, but that they could do quite well without them—perhaps better; and that they will only accept their aid on condition that they—the Radicals—entirely control the policy of the Liberal party. The truth is, my dear uncle, that the Whigs like to think they drive the party. But they have let the reins slip through their fingers; and while a few have been left in the road altogether (to be picked up by the rival coach), the remainder are either being dragged or are pulling behind, in the vain hope that they may not be observed to be there. Mr Cade is really the coachman, with people under

him, like Mr Giles, as ostlers, to do the dirty work."

"Metaphors are proverbially misleading. You probably know very little about the internal workings of the Government. We do, to a large extent, form the Government and control its actions. Without the Whig peers, with their influential and independent position, their business-like ability, their traditions of statesmanship, and inherited aptitude for government, the Liberal party could hardly exist, and could never come into power."

"I have noticed that although you so dislike my having become a Conservative, you yourself seem, to judge by your long and frequent letters to the 'Times,' to disapprove of the Liberal policy in detail, and to distrust almost all the Liberal measures."

"To a large extent I do, at the present moment. But I hold them to be an abnormal growth, due in a great measure to Mr Cade, who is, I think, a very dangerous person."

"Cade," broke in Claud, "I simply regard as an unscrupulous demagogue, who, for his own private advancement, is wilfully trying to break up his party; is violating every high tradition and un-

written law, not only of political morality, but even of gentlemanly conduct itself; and is quite prepared, if necessary, to assist in the ruin of his country, which I, for my part, think will probably be one of the most successful of his exploits—as party passion runs so high, that his party would probably assist him to ruin his country rather than permit him to destroy itself. They hate him, but they obey him—because he knows his own mind, and they don't know theirs. He takes a logical position, and they haven't one to take. He has petrified them by his Jacobin machinery. And I think that finally, by destroying the British Constitution, he will succeed in becoming himself Prime Minister."

"We must be careful about our language, Claud. But I agree with you that Mr Cade has too much power. It is, however, I assure you, quite impossible that he could ever be Prime Minister."

"I don't see how you can prevent it; but we shall see. Now what do you think of people like Giles, for instance?"

"Such people are useful tools. I know that the Conservative organisation is defective; but I suppose that even *you* have election agents?"

"Not like Giles. You will find that he is ceasing to be a tool, and is gradually turning, with Cade's help, into a dictator. And what about Ireland?"

"The misgovernment of Ireland has been deplorable—deplorable. But you must admit that both parties are to blame for their lamentable and fatal weakness. Mark this, Claud: whichever party you may eventually belong to," said Lord St Kevan solemnly, "it is *generally* fatal to a country when it begins to persistently break the moral laws; but it is *always* fatal to a country when it begins to persistently break the economic ones. I agree with you entirely as to the Radicals having too much—much too much—power at present. This seems to me to be the very reason why we should *not* leave our party — why, on the other hand, we should bring all the power and influence and talent which we may possess to bear upon our party for its true good, and in so doing, support its constitutional wing, by counteracting the socialistic part of it. Why, for instance, at the present time, some of the more moderate men of the Conservative party might join us, and help to form a Coalition Ministry."

Lord St Kevan was a shrewd man; but he never realised that the days of Coalition Ministries are over, and that Cabinets are no longer formed, rearranged, and dissolved by a few privileged gentlemen, in order to suit the will and pleasure of a dozen great families.

"Possibly, from the point of view of a great Whig peer, you may be right. But I, you see, am nobody. I don't affect any party by my change. And therefore I think it right, as far as I have any influence, to give it to the party which I consider at the present moment is the most constitutional and patriotic."

"I suppose you already take part in the tomfoolery of the Primrose League?"

"Yes, I am a member. I think myself that in some ways it may be a little foolish; but *you* have enfranchised so many very foolish people, that it is necessary sometimes to stoop a little towards their level," replied Claud, with a momentary air of triumph. "At any rate, it is harmless. *We* only promise to uphold the Throne and Constitution—in this way differing, I admit, from the many mischievous, dishonest, and ruinous promises which your party hold out as a bribe to attract their followers."

"I think we have discussed the subject enough," said Lord St Kevan, a little stiffly. They were entering Pompeii on their return. "I am lunching with Prince Chioggia, so I must say good-bye;" and he turned up a side street, leaving Claud to make his way alone to the central part of the town.

And so uncle and nephew separated. Really holding almost identical views on all fundamental questions, they only differed in their manner of approaching and their mode of expressing them.

Lord St Kevan in his heart admired Claud's quickness in divining the growing powerlessness of the Whigs, and was pleased at his generous indignation against the petty meanness, the unpatriotic partisanship, which were shown by so many members of his party, who violated their principles in order to retain their offices. He knew, with a sorrowful certainty, that no one had the pluck to say to Cade, or even to a greater than Cade, "We draw the line here. We know that this policy is illiberal and unconstitutional; it is opposed to both moral and economic laws, and if persisted in, will be fatal to the country."

Claud on his part respected his uncle. He ad-

mired his steadfastness to all the inherited principles of his family. And he knew that, to his uncle, the difference between the two parties was as the difference between light and darkness.

"It is possible to do wrong in the light," his uncle would probably say—"it is even possible to do wrong in consequence of the light; but is that any reason why we should leave the light for the darkness?"

And yet between these two, both generous, and each one trying to do justice to the other's point of view, the great wall of party had grown up. To a man in Lord St Kevan's position, with his training and principles, Claud's desertion was more than an error—was only less than a crime. In his heart of hearts he feared that the old order was passing away; and he held that this was the very reason why its children should stand by it till the last. It was this that made desertion the more ignoble, the more cowardly. There need be no decline if all were faithful; but every desertion tended to hasten the end, if the end were coming. So in the midst of all his love for his nephew, he felt a cold spot in his heart, and a sense of bitter dis-

appointment, almost of shame, took possession of him.

It is feared that a slightly erroneous impression may have been given of the place that politics occupied in Claud's thoughts and words; and that, judging from the specimens of his conversation which we have come across, it might be inferred that he was at all times a very serious and solemnly earnest person. No idea could be further from the truth. On a few subjects he thought deeply, felt strongly, and expressed himself decidedly, even eloquently, when they were touched upon. He nursed enthusiasms—almost romantic in their intensity—far down in his nature. But on the surface, no one could take light things more lightly or everyday affairs more easily. He combined, with a great deal of common-sense, a decided vein of humour. And these would have been sufficient to save him from ever tending to become priggish, even if his natural high spirits had enveloped less frivolity than they happily did. Besides, was he not in love? And who that is in love can give himself up to anything else?

At the present moment he was seated in the gig

of Lord Mawnan's yacht, with Mrs Denbigh and Claudia, Lady Marlowe, Mr Smythe, and the Leos. For Lord Mawnan, though not in what Tottie considered *the* smart set, and therefore not honoured by his acquaintanceship, had suddenly turned up in a charming hundred-ton schooner, The Shirt-front, which it appeared he possessed. He had asked some of his friends to come out to the yacht for lunch. He had a fancy for literary people, and had long known the Leos slightly. They, on the other hand, had long known him intimately; for to them a peer was still a peer, and they had not yet acquired Tottie's delicate perception of social differences. Besides having a fondness for literary people, Lord Mawnan had a special interest in Mrs Leo. He admired her beauty, and he delighted in plying her with playful banter.

Mr Smythe had managed to get himself invited by the same method that he employed to insert himself everywhere. Having in middle life emerged from comparative obscurity among the middle classes, he still proclaimed both the nature and place of his origin by indulging the world with his words slightly flavoured by a Somerset accent.

He had gradually managed, by perseverance, to make himself at first tolerated, and then even more or less necessary, to a large number of people. He was found to be very useful, and was used accordingly. The *jeunesse dorée* of the London clubs, indeed, made jokes and invented playful libels (in their heartless aristocratic way) at his expense. That he had begun life in a cheesemonger's shop was of course one of these; just as his having been a Mormon, and his having beaten a drum in the Salvation Army, were others. He good-naturedly forgave the youth (if they were very gilded), and they in return tolerated him; for he made up lists of young men, and supplied them to ladies who wanted a wholesale contingent ordered in for their dances.

There was a slight air of constraint over the whole party in the boat. Mr Smythe, for instance, was wondering why the Leos were asked, and whether he had made a mistake in not "taking them up." Were they going to be "coming people"? he asked himself. A keen instinct for coming people was part of the equipment of his profession. And could people be going to be so foolish as to make her a "beauty"? For in his

time he had sometimes seen fashion create beauty out of much more unpropitious material than Mrs Leo was composed of. Mrs Leo, on her part, did not care to talk. She heartily despised fashionable people. She believed that there was no one in the boat who could appreciate anything she might care to say; and she was quite sure that nothing they could say would have any interest for her. For some days she had been getting tired of Pompeii itself. She tried to persuade her husband to take her on to Sienna, "where they could be quiet." Mr Leo, although fond of culture, and professing to despise the world in general, was really rather worldly at the bottom of his heart. He had no desire to remove himself from a place "palpitating with actuality and scintillating with fashion." Even now he was trying to interest Mrs Denbigh by a paradoxical conversation, half playful, half in earnest, and was assuring her that wisdom is exterminated by education. She was, however, giving him but half of her attention; for something—perhaps the exquisitely acute maternal instinct which develops itself in the mothers of Society whenever danger threatens their daughters—seemed to warn

her to be on her guard. There were certain glances in Claud's eyes, tones in his voice, that she did not like. Claudia, she was sure, had noticed nothing as yet. But it must be put a stop to at once and for ever. Claudia was just the girl to take up a romantic idea and throw herself away—for she had a certain gentle serious tenacity of purpose which her mother dreaded. At the present moment her mother knew she was simply enjoying the air which blew in their faces so freshly, and the bounding motion of the boat as it danced over the little glancing waves.

By this time they were nearing the yacht. Lord Mawnan's figure stood out darkly at the gangway, waiting to welcome them. He was a sturdy well-made man, about five-and-thirty, with a dark bright face, and a closely cut black beard. He was dressed in a loose yachting-suit of blue serge. He was smiling and waving his hat. His whole manner and bearing seemed to radiate a breezy air of health and wholesome prosperity. And as he stood there, he was a picture of what a well-preserved Englishman should be.

"Here you all are!" he said, in his deep voice,

as the boat came up alongside. "Let me help you up, Mrs Denbigh. It's awfully good of you to come, Mrs Leo; we've no '*Botticellis*' for you on board, only bottled stout. How are you, Smythe? I hope I haven't torn you away from the Princess Chioggia; or perhaps you've brought her with you in your pocket—the last captured specimen, you know." All this was said in a cheery voice, and with a good-humoured smile which ought in itself to have disarmed offence, no matter with what words it was accompanied.

The party were soon on the deck; and then, as lunch was ready, they descended into the cabin.

"Mrs Denbigh must sit on one side of me, and Mrs Leo on the other. Then, with Miss Denbigh opposite, my cup of happiness will be overflowing," said Mawnan, as he arranged the company round the table. "Smythe, where will you sit? I must keep you in a good temper, or you will omit my name, I know, from your next season's list of young men."

Smythe was touched in a tender point, but he kept the smile on his countenance fixed, and said, "I—I shall be delighted to put it down. I didn't know you cared to go out."

"Well, 'pon my life, I don't think I do!" said Mawnan, cheerily. "One party's so like another."

"There are differences," suggested Smythe.

"Oh, I know there are—especially in the quality of the champagne," laughed Mawnan. Then he turned to Mrs Leo with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes—

"You know, Smythe gets up lists of all the suitable young men—I don't know if they pay him for the honour, I'm sure; and then a duchess sends for his lists, and orders in the men at the same time that she orders the supper."

"I can believe anything of young men nowadays," said Mrs Leo, in her cold deep voice. "Being brainless, they naturally take it as a matter of course that they should be ordered in like the plants."

"But they show their independence, I can tell you, by the coolness—some people would call it rudeness—of their behaviour after the invitation has arrived. For generally they either accept and then don't go, or they don't answer and then do go. And when they get to the party they only stay as long as it suits them, and refuse to dance if it's obvious that they're wanted to."

"I think that the only position more humiliating than theirs is that of the man who sends the invitations," said Mrs Leo, quite calmly.

Lord Mawnan felt she was going a little too far; so he said, "Oh, come now, you mustn't take it too seriously. I was only chaffing Smythe, you know; the lists are really very useful, and save a lot of trouble, I daresay."

Now Mrs Leo's strong point was not the reception of banter; and when she fancied that any one was trying to "draw her"—she was easily drawn—she at first became monosyllabic, and then extremely rude. She now turned on Mawnan.

"I dislike chaff," she said; "it is so frivolous."

"Aren't you ever tempted to be frivolous yourself?"

"I have few temptations, and that is certainly not one of them. If it were, I trust that I should have sufficient self-respect to overcome it."

"Dear, dear, how dull to have no temptations! I should think that a little chaff sometimes would act as a tonic,—would brace the system," said Mawnan, pleasantly.

Mr Smythe had been sitting in silent fury since Mrs Leo had snubbed him. He had made up his

mind that now, at any rate, she should *not* be a beauty. At the present moment he could think of nothing more crushing than the inquiry if she did not find the people at Pompeii very uncongenial to her.

"Yes," she answered, quite simply, "I was very disappointed. The people are merely a crowd of fashionable idlers; there are no really intellectual people there at all. They talk about nothing but society, politics, and sport—all three topics that I loathe."

"My dear, we must try and take an interest in the life around us," put in Mr Leo. He felt, as a man of the world, that his wife was a little wanting in *finesse*.

"Well, you couldn't have expected to find all that is most illustrious in literature and art on this yacht, for instance?" said Mawnan, still smiling.

"That would have been quite the last thing I should have expected to find," answered Mrs Leo, in her most composed and superior voice.

"All that is most illustrious in literature and art! Oh, I hope I haven't fallen *quite* so low as that," said Mawnan, bursting out laughing.

But Mrs Leo said nothing. She had long discovered that silence is the golden road for scorn.

The rest of the party had listened to the conversation with varying degrees of amusement. Claud, who had in his heart long alternated between thinking Mrs Leo insufferably perfect and perfectly insufferable, was secretly delighted when any one ventured to offer chaff at the shrine of that divinity. Claudia, on the other hand, admired Mrs Leo's scorn of all the pettiness and littleness around her, and she felt inclined to take her part. Mrs Denbigh simply regarded the Leos as harmlessly eccentric literary or artistic people; and she spent her time in wondering how they came to Pompeii, and why they had been asked on to the yacht. She only wished that Mrs Leo would not so entirely monopolise the conversation, and that if she so disliked "merely fashionable idlers"—a dislike that was heartily reciprocated—she would keep away from them.

After lunch every one wandered up on deck. Mawnan got a deliciously comfortable deck-chair for Mrs Denbigh, and then seated himself beside

her. He smoked, and laughed, and chatted on in the most entertaining way. He told her that he had known Mrs Leo for many years—ever since she was a tall solemn-eyed girl, and he had been a youth coaching with her father, when he had an idea of going into the army. "We used to go it cat and dog—just as we do now; and yet I really believe we respect one another at bottom. I know I used to be in love with her. I believe I once offered to her—yes, I know I did; because she said, 'Lord Mawnan, I would rather be a butcher's wife than be a soldier's,'—rather rough on me, wasn't it? So I said, 'A butcher! I bet you a fiver you marry some one worse than that.' But, do you know, I've never ventured to remind her of the bet since. It would be so confoundedly awkward to decide who had won it."

Claudia wandered to the forecastle. She found a chair for herself and a book, but she did not read much. She was wondering why Mrs Leo, with her high ideal and her intellectual aim, was after all so repellent. "Is it," she said to herself, "simply because she has no manners; or is it not, after all, something that goes deeper than that—a want of

genuine sympathy for all, even for the poor fashionable idlers around her?"

Claud had been hovering near, restrained for a moment by a strange feeling of bashful uncertainty. He now came forward, and took another chair that was standing near her.

Claudia looked up and smiled. "I was wondering," she said, "whether one cannot live a good and noble life without making people dislike one, on account of what they fancy are one's airs of superiority."

"Of course," answered Claud, warmly. "I hold that the best-loved people are the really best, through all the history of the world. If you are thinking of Mrs Leo, it is not her superiority we dislike—though I fancy a good deal of that is not quite genuine—it is her want of tact and manners; and then she is absolutely devoid of either sympathy or humour."

"You must not abuse her to me, for I am a great admirer of hers. I regard her with a vague awe, as though she were a visitant from another world. It is the very absence of sympathy and humour, and all the little everyday attributes of humanity,

that makes her like some majestic heroine in an ancient tragedy. She isn't accidental, she is antique. I never understood, before I saw her, how Helen of Troy could have existed; but now I can fancy her led on, smiling, from one husband to another, still acquiescing in the purpose of the gods."

Claud moved a little nearer. "Don't you think," he said, "that people who have a high ideal, and make a great profession of goodness, should try to be more charming, more loved, than they otherwise would be; and not try less, as so many good people seem to do? For if they are repellent, they act as a warning instead of an example."

"How true that is!" Claudia answered, softly. "Good people seem so often to mean by their manner, 'I may be good, but I am not nice.'"

And so they chatted on. We need not follow their casual talk any longer. The conversation of two young people, when one of them is in love with the other, is much the same as other young people's talk. If there is any difference, it is that the lover's words are generally slower in coming, and present themselves in more disjointed sentences than usual. It was delightfully warm; floods of sunshine filled

the air, and danced back in reflected brightness from the tips of the waves. The two formed a pretty picture as they sat there together: Claudia, lying back in her chair, sheltered by a red parasol from the glare of the deck and the glitter of the sea; Claud leaning a little forward and talking eagerly, his vivid face dyed with a brighter flush by the same sunshine that lit up her smile and turned her hair to gold. And behind them, as a far-away background, was the endless, the matchless blue of blending sky and billow.

CHAPTER VII.

THE morning bathe was a great institution at Pompeii. The beautiful marble swimming-bath was generally crowded with men from ten to twelve, who, after they had taken their dip, often lounged about talking, and even stayed to breakfast, beneath the striped awning which sheltered the little *caffè* at one end of it. The other end opened directly on to the sea; and the spreading view it gave was only broken here and there by a slim bronze statue that glowed with a burning green or brownish lustre in the hot air, and rested at the marble rim, to be reflected, Narcissus-like, in the ruffled waters at its feet. The classical air of the whole scene was certainly not assisted by a scarlet silk bathing-dress, edged with Roman lace, in which Tottie daily disported himself, jumping up and down

in the shallow water at one end of the bath (he could not swim), and generally singing little snatches of comic song as he did so. But while he amused himself thus, other people went on with their bathe as though he were not in existence. Claud and Darlington, for instance, were now sitting on the edge of the bath drying themselves in the sunshine; sparkling drops trickled down them, and dripped off their dangling legs into the water below. Claud was smoking a cigarette, and half lying back against one of the dark bronze statues. Darlington, also smoking, found himself being lulled, by the warmth and the gentle reaction after the cool of the water, into the pathways that lead to sleep. Claud stretched out his arm and recalled him from this delicious loiter by touching him on the shoulder.

"I have something to tell you," he said, in explanation. "The truth is, old boy—don't laugh at me—but I'm really in love at last!"

"In love!" said Darlington, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes. Who do you think it is with?"

"Not the American girl, I hope," replied Darlington, quickly; "for I really believe I'm in love with her myself."

"No—with Miss Denbigh." And then Claud went on to explain how hopeless his love was. He mentioned his own position—his strained relationship with his uncle; and he asked Darlington to picture to himself Mrs Denbigh's maternal horror when such a detrimental candidate presented himself.

Darlington, who was sanguine both from experience and disposition, assured him that relations could always be got over. "And at the worst," he added, lightly, "you know, she may not really care for you although you *are* in love with her. But it's quite time we dressed." And dress they accordingly did.

As they were strolling down the Forum they met Lady Marlowe. She told Claud that Mr Cade was in one of the billiard-rooms, and asked if he would be kind enough to find him for her. She added that Courier had arrived, and therefore she was anxious that Mr Cade should join them at lunch. "Tell him I am having lunch in my own rooms to-day; and if you care to join us, I shall be delighted."

Darlington, in the meantime, had been pounced upon and carried off by Mr Smythe, so that Claud

had to make his search alone. He soon, however, found Mr Cade in close confabulation with Mr Giles, and gave him Lady Marlowe's message. "That will do now, Giles; the Lords are to be tolerated for the present," said Mr Cade, in his loud, strident voice—a voice among whose tones the ominous idea of "Yield, or you are doomed," always seemed to lurk. Then he suggested to Claud that they should walk up to Lady Marlowe's together.

Mr Cade was a large, thick-set man, whose bull-dog neck and slightly sinister expression denoted determination and hinted at possible mischief. If he was not satisfied with the world (as it was at present), he was obviously satisfied with himself, which was much more important. He had begun life, as has before been mentioned, with the profession of a temperance lecturer. But finding it more philanthropic than lucrative, he soon abandoned it—for his love of his fellow-creatures was not so exceptionally keen as one might have judged from the tone of his speeches—and entered the tailoring business, with large shops in the City and West End. Indeed, so successful was he both in

pushing his trade and in forcing his employees to work for still longer hours and for still smaller wages than the rival houses gave, that at last he succeeded in ruining most of these, and finally almost monopolised the wholesale tailoring business. And this will not be wondered at when the reader is assured that the young gentlemen in the city offices thought his "eleven and ninepenny pants" were equal to the thirteen and sixpenny pairs of other firms. Finding that his half-starved workmen could only afford to live crowded together like animals rather than men, he was naturally anxious that they should be better housed (at somebody else's expense). The first thing to be done was to engraft upon the Liberal party a series of Jacobin clubs (somewhat after the pattern of those established during the French Revolution), and then to delude the party with the impression that they were merely an improved form of organised representation. But when once established, he quietly proved to them that he had matured his machinery in order to organise representation out of existence. Members were turned into delegates; and, goaded on by a hinted reign of terror they began to ac-

quiesce in his plans of plunder, his plots for robbery. He showed them how, by the fortunate conditions inherent in a democratic form of government, they could rob (from the very nature of the case) with absolute impunity; that whatever they might do, they would be perfectly safe. For could they not escape from Justice by wrapping the sacred ægis of the State around them, while at the same moment they were strangling Liberty among its folds?

Mr Cade was, however, quite clever enough to have a social side, and it was this side which was presented to the company during lunch. He was a well-informed man, and the general conversation touched on the various topics of the day, steering clear of politics, as though to avoid "the shop." M. Courier chatted on about all that was newest in Paris. The fresh piece at the Palais Royal, "Le Bâton," was discussed. It was so successful, they were told, that Paris rang with a new song which had been made out of it—

"J'ai un bâton, un petit bâton."

Then the conversation passed over to London. Lady Marlowe explained to M. Courier that the struggle for existence had at last even invaded

Society; that the smartest young men in town had taken to the Stock Exchange, had taken to the stage. And she poured into his astonished ear the fact that one of her friends—a charming boy—had just joined the music-hall profession, and had already appeared at the Pavilion with immense success. All M. Courier could do was to murmur "Vraiment!" with an air of incredulous politeness.

"And the delightful thing is," went on Lady Marlowe, "that none of these young men in the least forfeit their social position, if they have once been taken up by Society. For if you are once in Society, you are privileged to do almost exactly what you like."

"Strange people, you English," murmured M. Courier. "Your country is supposed to be aristocratic, but with us such a thing would be impossible."

"Oh," put in Cade, "all Society wants is excitement. In England nothing stops them, if one or two of the right people set the example. It's a sign that the whole thing is at its last gasp, and will very soon come to an end entirely."

"Oh, please don't destroy us quite yet!" re-

sponded Lady Marlowe. "It is very pleasant at present; and I know you really enjoy it yourself" (which was quite true). "Although this is only lunch, I am going to leave you, gentlemen," she added, rising; "and then you can conspire in peace together."

She passed out of the room. The two politicians drew their chairs together, leaving Claud at the table slowly demolishing strawberries.

At first the conversation, although it had taken a political tone, confined itself more or less to generalities. Mr Cade described the machinery of the Caucus, and M. Courier regretted that they could not manage something of the sort in France.

"You Radicals," he went on, in his broken accent, "can advance in England so much faster than we can in France. For why? You have still the aristocracy and the great landlords to hold up for attack. We have no ruling aristocracy, and the land is held by so many that we should have no chance with that. Our great enemy is the middle class—the *bourgeoisie*. But they are so numerous, so stupid, so conservative, that they prevent everything." M.

Courier threw up his hands and eyebrows at this unaccountable effort of self-preservation.

"We have the same trouble, to a certain extent. All our small shopkeepers and that class are ratting —turning Conservative, you know. Why, I can't think; for their pockets won't be touched. At least," said Mr Cade, with his most magnanimous air, "I for my part have always intended that they shall be left alone."

"Ah, you happy man! you are in the Cabinet, you can control. I am a power, but somehow I am unaccountably omitted from every Government that is formed."

"Yes; your Governments are, after all, very reactionary. You see, we are blessed in England with an unwritten constitution; and so we can stretch it, and stretch it, to fit anything that we want, until——"

"Until it breaks up and has ceased to exist," put in M. Courier, with a laugh. "Yet somehow, out of your country, all over the world, your Conservatives are better liked."

"That is because of their flashy, unscrupulous, aggressive foreign policy," said Cade, with a little

more warmth than he had yet shown—"that absurd sentiment which they cultivate, and call patriotism. Some of them want imperial federation with the colonies. As though we were likely to stand that! Now our plan is to lessen in every way the country's responsibilities—to try and avoid having any foreign policy, and to attend to our own affairs at home. We want slowly to dismember the empire (the very word 'empire' makes me sick), if it can be done without friction. And I assure you we are getting on. Ireland, I think, we can leave safely in the Prime Minister's hands; for I have no doubt, in a year or two, he will have contrived her arrival at such a pass that Englishmen will be only too anxious to grant her 'Home Rule.' The detachment of the Colonies, I think, may be also safely left to our present Colonial Minister. But the difficulty to me is India. I cannot see how we are to get rid of it, unless Russia is kind enough to take it."

Mr Cade, in his earnestness for the reconstruction of the empire, had entirely forgotten Claud's presence, and so he continued, "My private plan is to give her autonomy. You know what I mean,—

make her independent, and set up a representative Government there—in the same way that we are going to give Ireland a representative Government. The Liberal party, led on by those d—— aristocratic Whigs, have crushed down and trampled on the people of Ireland and India quite long enough. And look what a saving of expense it will be! I have drafted a bill for the purpose. I shall show it to the Cabinet when I get back; but I don't somehow fancy they'll like it. If they don't, we must turn on the screw," concluded Cade, with a wink.

"How conscientious you are!" cried M. Courier. "You cannot bear to see any one oppressed—even when you do it yourself."

"The Radical party are the conscientious party," replied Mr Cade, with dignity.

"And when you have got rid of all your responsibilities?"

"Then we shall be a happy little island to ourselves, with no foreign complications or entanglements, no army and a very small fleet, with certainly no rich people, and I hope no poor ones. Every man will have his two or three acres, his

pig or perhaps his cow. There will not be any unwholesome amount of liberty, and the people will be relieved from the government of the country by the machinery which I am setting up. The minority are no longer to trample on the majority, but the majority are to be absolutely autocratic. If that isn't Democracy, I don't know what is."

"A paradise, a paradise!" cried M. Courier. "Oh that I could only look forward to such a future for my poor France!"

"And I forgot to add—which is the most important thing after all—that we shall be sufficiently patriotic somehow to manage that we are always in office and power, and the other party always in Opposition."

"Ah, you are a real statesman!" put in M. Courier, not satirically, but quite innocently.

Claud looked up, his eyes flashing. He felt as though he had been participating in a treasonable plot, assisting in some unholy incantation wrought by a dark conspirator. "We think that Mr Cade is the greatest of his kind," he said. Then there was a momentary pause before

he added, "But we cannot hope that he will be the last."

Mr Cade sprang round as though he had been struck. He had forgotten Claud's presence for the moment; and now that he was reminded of it, he seemed inclined to express himself somewhat strongly for a statesman. Perhaps this idea occurred to him, for he instantly restrained himself, and said, with an awkward laugh, "I really forgot you were there, Mr Brownlow. But I am not sorry that one of your order should have heard what a plain-spoken leader of your party thinks, who knows his own mind and isn't afraid of calling a spade a spade. When I talk about your party, I presume you call yourself a Liberal and really are an aristocratic Whig."

"No; I am a Conservative."

"Your uncle calls himself a Liberal."

"He *is* one." Claud's temper was rising at the underlying insolence in the man's tone and manner; but Mr Cade, on the contrary, had so far recovered his, as to tender a little (statesmanlike) counsel.

"Come," he said, "let me give you one piece of

advice. You had better join us. We are the winning party, yours is the losing. It is always better to be on the winning side."

"No, thank you, I shall not change. I would rather do what I thought was right, even if it deprived me of the pleasure of helping you in your schemes of plunder, than be on the winning side in my country's ruin. Besides, I am not so sure that we may not succeed after all."

"Succeed, succeed!" said Mr Cade, testily. "Why, what the deuce can you succeed in?"

Claud, as he rose from the table, flamed up. "Succeed!" he said, and he looked like an angry young prince as he did so. "We may yet succeed in saving our country—from you." And he strode out of the room.

Out of the room he strode, and on until he reached the sea-shore. He sat down among the pebbles on the beach, still tingling with indignation. He himself was not sure why he felt so angry. Was it, he asked himself, merely a burst of temper at Cade's insufferable tone, or could it really be the indignation of his outraged patriotism? He laughed a little at the phrase—at the

idea of his patriotism being of a quality to be "outraged." He hated all forms of posing. He disliked people who professed to have such exquisitely sensitive natures that they could not help feeling much more keenly than the rest of the world about affairs which in no way concerned them particularly. Why should he be more indignant at Cade's theories, he said to himself, than any one else was? He was not constituted a guardian of his country's honour and greatness. And if he were, he would probably be unable to save her from Mr Cade and his schemes.

"A democratic form of government is inevitable, it seems. Indeed, have we not got it now? It is true that no form of government could be more fatal to the supremacy, or even existence, of such an empire as ours. But that will not check its advent; with some," thought Claud, with a bitter smile, "it will be an additional incentive to force it upon us." And then he recalled all the numberless sons of England who would cheerfully die to save their dear country from ruin, if only they saw the way — men, even now, who were fighting her battles and steering her navies, aiding her suffer-

ing ones, guiding her sinful ones, raising her lost ones.

Yet they were scattered, outnumbered, outwitted. Some were blinded by faction, and some were repressed by their party ties, and all were helpless—a hopelessly small minority. "For are we not ruled entirely by numbers now?"

Claud really loved his country; and the specious pretexts by which her poor people were slowly but surely being enticed to accomplish her doom and their own, seemed to his generous soul an unscrupulous sign of the criminal plots they concealed. If the reader now thinks him a very foolish young man, I can only point to his youth as a plea for forgiveness; for one of the chief of youth's numerous follies, we find, is intolerant hatred of meanness, self-seeking, and treachery—a folly which, while we deplore it, we are thankful to know will be one of the first to be extinguished by the growth of prudence and worldly experience.

And if the reader thinks that Claud had better attend to his own business, instead of troubling himself about patriotic affairs which in no way concerned him, I can also hasten to comfort him

on this point also, by the assurance that Claud was at this very moment engaged in some really practical and important business of his own. A dress which he had ordered for a grand fancy ball that was going to be held the same evening had just arrived, and he was now trying it on to see if it fitted.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ball was to be the most exquisite thing of its kind ever given on the Riviera. A large part of the Forum had been boarded over for the floor; and above, a vast awning had been stretched by cords in the approved classical manner. At the end farthest from the sea rose a glorious bank of flowers; but the sea end of the extemporised ball-room was left free to secure a refreshing view of the darkening sky and the quiet waters as they passed away to the drowsy outskirts of the approaching night.

As the evening drew on, servants might have been seen flitting here and there in their airy and delicate classical dresses. Lights woke up one by one; and each little spark lightly powdered the marbles around it with brightness. Glimpses of

fruit and of flowers heaped on tables laid out in the temples, might have been caught by inquisitive eyes. And then specials arrived from the other towns on the coast, even coming as far as from Cannes. Mr Smythe was for once in the highest of spirits. Already dressed as the great Mogul, he hastened here and ran hither. He smoothed the way for this person (probably a grand-duchess), and he skilfully avoided the way of that one (who was probably nothing more than an old and valueless friend).

Gradually the marble Forum filled with people, then suddenly flashed into dazzling brilliance as the electric light burst on the night from its thousands of opalesque lamps. There was a sudden revelation of high-bred princesses and lightsome fairies; noble lords and beautiful pages; pretty flower-girls and peasants; fisher-boys, matadors, soldiers, and sailors: costumes of every age, and from every country, clashing in a delicious confusion of movement and colour. The very air seemed to palpitate — charged with the dreamy music, the tinted lights, the delicate perfumes, and the resonant murmur of hundreds of happy voices. The

whole was immersed in a subtle glamour, alluring the senses, and leading them captive, as though seen with unearthly charm in some ancient magician's mirror.

Claud was there, dressed as a Florentine youth of the *cinque cento*. With his long striped tights, his short fanciful doublet all covered with puffs and slashes, and his little red cap with its single feather, which nestled so knowingly among his curls, he looked as though he might have slipped out of some old painting by Signorelli, or been a boon companion to one of those gentlest of warriors who fit on their dainty armour so gracefully in the frescoed "arts of war" at South Kensington. He called himself Tito; for since the events of the afternoon, he quite felt as though he had been conspiring against the liberties of his country. He was now leaning against a pillar, in order to watch the various groups passing backwards and forwards. Mrs Leo swept by, looking really most beautiful as the Duchess of Malfi. She did not dance; but she stood in her queen-like pre-eminence, crushing by contrast, she knew, the surrounding throng of mere butterflies—soulless, idealess

slaves of fashion. Then he thrilled for a moment as he caught a glimpse in the distance of Mrs Denbigh and Claudia—Claudia looking, to him, more lovely than ever, but dressed this evening in the simple grey of a Sister of Charity. They passed out of sight, and before he had time to move towards them, Miss van Knut walked up to him. She was dressed in a Japanese costume—that is, as a Frenchified, fancified, idealised Japanese Folly, such as one might fancy M. van Beers could design. Tiny masks hung by silver chains to her waist, their eyes twinkling with unholy mockery. As she walked, there were glimpses of impish mouths that grinned out from the folds of her skirt. A quaint little Japanese devil sat up on her hair, happily posing himself with an air of serenity so diabolic that one could not help laughing.

"What do you think of my dress?" she said in a moment. "It was designed for me by a friend of mine—a young artist—in Paris."

"It is so wonderful," said Claud, "that it has the disadvantage of even taking some of one's attention from the wearer."

"My! that's very pretty! I haven't heard any-

thing so pretty since I came to Europe. A young girl feels the change when she comes to Europe, I can tell you."

"The change!"

"Oh yes; we are much more appreciated in New York, you bet. There we are at a premium; here poor women seem to be a drug in the market. And it's the young men who are at a premium, and have to be petted and coaxed and made much of—I'm sure I don't know why."

"Because a really complete and charming young man is such a wonderfully perfect production of nature and training. To possess a son nowadays is to possess a great but expensive luxury. It's almost like having a steam-yacht. You shouldn't have these luxuries if you can't afford them. But what so many parents fail to grasp is that, if you do indulge in these things, you *must* keep them up properly."

"Men in Europe seem to think themselves very precious and indispensable, I'm sure. Now in America we don't 'keep up' young men; *they* have to work for their bread, in order to keep up the ladies and give them a lovely time. Do you

know anything about America? do you ever read any of our books?"

"Oh yes; a great many."

"Who is your favourite novelist?"

"I think Henry James. Many of his short stories are simply exquisite. He is so wonderfully subtle."

"Yes; we're told that the way in which a lady lifts her arm from a table in carrying a teacup to her lips may contain all the elements of a modern tragedy—which certainly shows subtlety, if not sense. We don't like him much in America. We don't think he does us justice."

"Not do you justice, my dear Miss van Knut!" cried Claud. "Why, he describes the most delightful Americans."

"We think his nice Americans are too English, and his nasty Americans are too—too——"

"American?" suggested Claud.

"Your manners are worse than mine," replied the young lady, and the masks round her waist gave a jangle of assent. "You've not only insulted my nation, but, what is worse, you've neglected me, and haven't asked me to dance yet."

"You must forgive me, and ask me to dance instead. As for American novelists and their characters, I think, do you know, in their heart of hearts the Americans are still a little envious of our upper classes."

"Oh, you think so, do you? We can get on very well without them, I'm sure." Then she changed her tone and continued, "Now we will dance, and I will tell you a secret." She dropped her voice, and half playfully whispered, "*They are*——"

Mrs Denbigh, like a *grande dame* of the last century, in her rich brocaded dress and her powdered hair, was watching the gorgeous scene—Claudia had left her to dance—and spending the time in conversation with people around. She had a very quick eye, and for some time it had been "on" Miss van Knut. She turned to her neighbour and said, "What an extraordinary nation the Americans are!"

"They are," said her neighbour.

"They are so irrepressible. An English girl in a horrible dress like that, who behaved in that simply disgusting way, wouldn't be tolerated for a moment. She flirts," said Mrs Denbigh, "as though

she were a kitchen-maid. She hasn't even the decency to conceal her flirtations. And yet she's received, and seems actually popular."

"They say that a woman, to be popular nowadays, must be prepared to say *almost* anything herself, and to permit *quite* anything to be said to her," rejoined the other lady.

"Yes; but that is the extraordinary thing about those American girls. With all their impropriety of manner, they are really extremely particular about that sort of thing. But that makes it all the more dangerous. We must try and protect our young men from their snares." Mrs Denbigh was really rather relieved to see that the dangerous siren—as she thought her—had commenced to spin her charms round Claud; for Darlington was the one particular young man she was determined to shelter, "whatever the cost to herself," as she would have said.

"Perhaps, after all, it is only simplicity," said the other lady.

"I call it barbarity," Mrs Denbigh remarked, with a certain weight in her tone which was calculated to carry conviction. "The other day I

asked her what she thought of Lord Darlington—I wanted to sound her, you know, and delicately show her that people were noticing her conduct to him—and she answered me with an exquisite calmness of audacity, which I'm bound to say even a duchess couldn't surpass: 'Lord Darlington—why, I think he's just simply lovely, he's perfectly sweet.' She called the eldest son of a peer perfectly sweet—to me, a comparative stranger! Why, you know, it's unheard of; it's almost beyond the pale of civilisation."

While Mrs Denbigh continued to express herself on the deformation of character produced by a new country, and the awfully demoralising effect that that character had on those of the Old World it happened to cross (a kind of inverted strong-drink-and-gunpowder theory), Darlington, in the garb of a jockey, was having a "fine time of it." He danced with one young lady and another, flirting with each, in his naïve boyish way, as desperately as the time allowed. And this, we know, is painfully short (even when you are the eldest son of a peer, and therefore assisted by every properly brought up young lady with all

her might), if you have determined to dance every dance throughout the evening.

He was searching about for one of his partners, when he espied Miss van Knut. He rushed up to her; and—dazed, let us hope, by the spell of the dress on the sorceress—threw over his fair one, and told Miss van Knut he was waiting for her to dance with him.

She promptly surpassed him in unscrupulousness, and threw over an old German baron that Mr Smythe had planted on her.

Round they floated to the magic of a Waldteufel valse, played by the Monte Carlo band, which had been brought over for the occasion.

"Now," said Darlington, when the music ceased, "I will take you out for a little row on the sea."

"Is it very naughty?"

Darlington assured Miss van Knut that every one was doing it. And she thought she would not go. At last, after much persuasion, he got her into the boat, and pulled her out a little way from the land. The waning moon had just risen. It still had that unearthly luminous redness with which it

sometimes glows after rising, not giving light, but hanging in the sky as though big with mysterious portent. The sea was black and oily. And when they had pulled out some way, the lights of Pompeii made all around them seem darker by contrast.

"Stop, Lord Darlington; I want to go back," said Miss van Knut from the darkness.

"I am going to pull you to Africa," replied Darlington, in a bantering tone.

And he had to be sternly commanded before the boat's head began to turn in a homeward direction.

"I suppose you don't have anything as gay as this in New York," suggested Darlington.

"I assure you we do; we've the very nicest society."

"The President, and all that sort of thing, of course."

"No, not the President, at least not generally. In America we are very select. And most of the Presidents are not received by the really high-toned families. I've been introduced to the present one, though."

"What was he like?" inquired Darlington.

"I don't know; I didn't see him. I was introduced through the telephone."

"Dear me! Did you ring him up?"

"Papa did. He rang him up to know if he could have the London legation; and then he introduced me—after he had heard that he couldn't. But you mustn't think, from the people we know here, that we're not exclusive. Because in America we're very exclusive indeed. In Europe, you see, it don't matter."

"I suppose you won't know me when I come to New York," said Darlington.

"That depends on how you behave. But if you're good, I'll take you round myself and give you a really good time."

Thus the exquisite night passed on.

So charming was it to float seawards in a boat, so cool and delightful to wander about at the star-lit end of the Forum, that the ball-room was thinned in its numbers, although there were plenty of happy couples left to dance the hours away.

And even the laughter and talk of the crowds thronging the snug little supper-rooms in the surrounding temples were mellowed and blended with

streams of delicious music that flowed from the band.

Every one seemed happy. Miss Rattletubs, dressed as a female Doctor of Divinity, looked busy and pleased. She was not dancing this evening, she said—which was quite true, as she had not been asked; but she walked about, and made or renewed acquaintances here and there among the crowd. One of these renewed acquaintances was Mrs Denbigh. They had, strange to say, several opinions in common. One of them, a dislike of "that little American flirt," as they called her, was not touched upon at the present time; for poor Mr Smythe happened to pass at that moment, and Miss Rattletubs turned her attention on him.

"Look at that man," she said; "can't you see him in his young days serving behind the cheesemonger's counter, when he was simply called Smith. They say, you know, his real name is Smith."

Now in Society it was the fashion to tolerate Mr Smythe (on account of his philanthropic exertions in its behalf), but to laugh at him all the same. So Mrs Denbigh felt she might allow herself to smile, as she answered—

"Oh, come now! you know, I don't really believe in the shop. It's only a joke that some of the boys have invented. He's a good, useful creature, and is kept by Society, because he gets their things up for them. Besides, you know, we shouldn't be here to-night if it wasn't for him. He invented Pompeii."

At this moment Lord Mawnan came up and carried Mrs Denbigh off to supper. We need not describe the meal. It was like any other luxurious feast of the kind. But Mawnan, having taken Mrs Denbigh back to her seat, returned, as men will, to leisurely finish his own supper, unhampered by female attractions. He found Claud seated on one side of him, and at once broke into conversation, in his hearty enjoyable way.

"I've been dancing to-night," he said, "with the most delightful Japanese girl—at least she's really an American girl, don't you know. She makes all the ladies quite wild. She's really so awfully unworldly and natural that, by Jove, they can't understand such simplicity! She's quite like Galatea in the play, and they'll finish her off if they can. But she knows how to take care of herself, which Galatea didn't; and she's got a spice of

mischief in her when she's roused. She's awful fun, too. What do you think she told me she's been doing to-night? Why, she danced twice with one of these Italian waiters. She pretended to think he was an Italian prince in costume. But she says that she found him much more amusing than a real Italian prince, and much more polite than an English one."

There was a good-looking young man in a uniform seated opposite to them. He had made one or two remarks to Mawnan; and Claud inquired who he was.

"He's called Redburn," answered Mawnan. "A charming sort of fellow. He's rather a piquant kind of mixture, too; for you wouldn't think he was an artist, would you?"

"I thought he was in the army."

"That's a yeomanry uniform. He's a great riding man—hunts, plays polo at Hurlingham, and so on. Besides which, he paints little pictures in the most advanced Franco-American style—Whistler—that sort of thing; little things, all colour and tone, that look equally beautiful whichever way you turn them."

"He looks too close-cropped and well-groomed for an artist."

"Yes; he's not in the least artistic to look at, but I'm told his paintings are nothing else. I'll introduce you." And Mawnan proceeded to do so across the table. "Let me introduce the great coming R.A. and our future Lord Chancellor," he said, in his humorous, good-natured way.

"R.A.!" said Redburn, coming round to their side of the table. "Well, I never expected to be called an R.A.; but one never knows what one may come to some day." And then he and Claud fell to talking about Paris. He told him that the artist life there was really very pleasant, if you didn't mind roughing it and put all your English notions in your pocket. "Besides," he added, "I used occasionally to mitigate the Bohemianism of the life by disguising myself as a gentleman, and going to dine at the Café Anglais." Then, having finished their strawberries, they rose from the table; and Redburn went to look for M. Courier, whom he had slightly known in Paris, in order to introduce him to Mrs Denbigh, as that lady was anxious to make his acquaintance.

Claudia all this while had been dancing, and supping, and talking, doing all sorts of delightful things, with her heart full of happiness. For the one thing in society she really enjoyed was a thoroughly good dance. Now Darlington's turn had come. He walked up to her, and suggested that they should sit out their dance. "And then, you know, we can have a good talk about hunting," he said. "Don't you wish we were hunting now, instead of being stuck here with all these people?"

"Yes, yes; let us talk about hunting," she answered. And talk about hunting they did. They discussed the hounds and the hunters, the runs they had had in the winter, the adventures through which they had passed. For a talk about hunting need never end for lack of material, when two young and ardent riders combine to describe and enjoy its delights together.

There is the "meet" in the early spring morning, when the mist still lies lightly along the valleys. The whole neighbourhood seems to be gathering at the appointed place—often an open space in the midst of a village street. On one side, the old

grey church, and its slumbering yew-guarded churchyard; and on the other, the sleepily dignified inn that has known better days,—its quaint little bar now awakened and bustling—its ancient yard filled with grooms and their masters, with mounting riders and unharnessed dog-carts.

The street is blocked with a happy crowd. There are men in pink and in black, spotless and radiant—their white breeches, with tiny bows tied at the knee, shining above their polished "tops" and their glittering spurs. There are young men in brown; boys (home for the holidays) mounted on ponies; sturdy young farmers on cobs; and ladies and girls, glowing and flushed by excitement and exercise, dressed in short, dainty, tight-fitting habits, and patting their horses' necks, while they talk to their friends around; there are others in dog-carts, who have driven over to "hunt upon wheels" if they can—and if not, to see as much of the fun as possible. On the pavements stand rows of spectators. The villagers look on with stolid interest, the children cluster around with broad smiles of intelligence.

Every man feels that all are his neighbours for

once—all his companions—with one common interest, one all-absorbing delight; until at last the master, the huntsmen, the whips, and the hounds come up. Then the chatter redoubles, girths are finally looked to, every one settles himself in his saddle, all the horses' heads turn in the same direction, and the field trot away together behind the hounds and the huntsmen.

We have neither the time nor the space to follow the day any further: to picture the scattered field, waiting down by the sheltering covert—the knowing ones planted in likely places, and both horses and men all alert with restrained expectation; to follow the glorious run—half a lifetime of happy emotions, supreme excitements, and hair-breadth escapes crowding into the flying minutes.

We cannot follow; but Darlington and Claudia did, in their talk. They rode their hunts over again; they took their hedges; they distanced competitors; they were in at the death. They were breathless—with mere description; and glad recollections alone filled their eyes with responsive sparkle.

"Have you ever noticed one difference between

horses and dogs?" Claudia went on, when Darlington had pulled up breathless. "A dog is aristocratic in his ideas. He is essentially a courtier. He discriminates in a moment between the kitchen with its inhabitants, and the master of the house with his friends. A horse, on the other hand, is democratic. He makes no distinctions; but he (like many democrats) is fond of pageant, pomp, and glitter."

"I never thought of that before," answered Darlington. And by way of saying something, he remarked—"I suppose you've had a lot of dances with Claud?"

"No. I have not seen him all evening."

"Not seen him!" burst out Darlington. "I should have thought——" and he paused and blushed with boyish awkwardness at his blunder. Then with a change of tone he suddenly added, "But here he comes at last." And Claud walked up to them as he did so.

Claud's heart was beating. He had tortured himself by postponing the moment for fear of appearing too eager; for fear of Mrs Denbigh; for the numerous reasons a young man assigns when

for once he is seized with a modest timidity. And now, though the ball was nearly over, he had come to claim one valse, and that valse was granted. As they stood up to begin, he asked Claudia if she had yet been out for a row; and when he found that she had not, proposed that, instead of dancing, they should have a short pull on the sea.

Claudia hesitated, for she doubted if Mrs Denbigh approved of dances being "sat out" in boats. Claud still pressed her, and so she yielded at last. "You ought," she said, "in that costume, to play a mandolin. Haven't you got one that you could bring with us?" Claud asked if a banjo would do as well; and being told that even that was better than nothing, he fetched his from his room, as they passed by on their way to the landing-stage.

As soon as they reached the boat, Claudia said that for once she was going to row, and Claud must sit in the stern and sing to her. He had to give in, after demurring a little, and the boat glided out to the night under the steady stroke of Claudia's sculls. Claud strummed in a gently vague way on

his banjo, until they had got out a little distance, when he ventured to sing one or two nigger songs. Claudia asked him for "Oh, dem Golden Slippers!" and his voice gave the sorrowful air all its wistful sadness — an air vaguely suggesting the soft crooning prayer of an alien race for the happier days of long ago.

"Thank you," said Claudia slowly, and she ceased for the present from rowing. "When shall we have such a beautiful night again? Everything is so still and so calm. We might be in some land of other days."

"Yes," said Claud, and his fingers still hinted an air on the murmuring banjo-strings:—

"'The moon shines bright. In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise,—in such a night——'

You know the rest."

"'I would outnight you did nobody come,'" answered Claudia, appropriately.

"But nobody does come."

"Yes, Mr Cade—I mean, he comes into our conversation. I want to know why he is so hated."

"On such a night why need we mention Cade?" asked Claud, with the look of a poet who is interrupted in the midst of a recitation of one of his own works. "But if he must come," Claud continued, "he shall find his match. He is hated, then, partly because he is feared, and partly because he is unprincipled."

"But he is very clever," said Claudia, in an unsatisfied tone.

"His unscrupulousness is his cleverness, I think. Or if you like to put it the other way, he is clever enough to know that he can succeed best by being unscrupulous."

"Well, I think people are very hard on him. But then, you know, I am a great Radical."

"A Radical?"

"Yes. For when one sees all the poverty and all the misery around one, how can one help—how can any one help—wishing and trying to improve their lot? I long that I could do something to help them."

"I feel the same for the poor that you do. But, do you know, that is exactly the reason why I'm a Conservative. Must we still, for the thousandth

time, contradict the monstrous assertion that the poor and their welfare are less to us than to the Radicals? They mature them for tools. We wish to teach them the self-reliance of men. They would turn them into poor Socialists; we into patriotic Englishmen. But we can't talk any more politics at present. The night is too beautiful for anything but——" then he caught himself up, and said "poetry. As Shakespeare would say—

"'On such a night all politics must pall.'

And as for Cade—well, to show you the kind of man he is, I will tell you what I heard him say to Courier only this afternoon; only please don't tell any one else, as I heard it in confidence." And Claud repeated as much of their conversation as he could remember. When he had finished, Claudia proposed that they should return. She thought their dance must be over now. Claud thought, though he did not say so, that not only their dance, but the two following ones, must be also passed. He asked her to let him pull them back. They changed places; yet when Claud had possession of the sculls, they did not seem to move with any

undue briskness through the water. They rather loitered caressingly, and scattered it back on itself in bright drops of liquid fire.

"A drifting boat lulls one so gently; it rocks all one's nature to sleep, till it almost bears one away from one's self."

"Yes, one floats on and on, and dreams one will never wake," said Claud, in a tone of languid acquiescence.

"And, therefore, I don't wish to drift any longer, please," put in Claudia, with a light in her eye. "Try and pull us a little faster."

Claud dipped his sculls in again, but again took up the drifting talk. "Think of poor Maggie, in 'The Mill on the Floss,' all that long warm day, floating down to the sea, as passive as the victim of an incantation—almost irresponsible and wholly unresisting."

"Poor, poor Maggie. She, I think, is my favourite heroine. Sinned against, not sinning. The victim of fate—of the hard, unrelenting, inexorable circumstances around her. And yet how she struggled! Are we all as powerless in the hands of fate, do you think?"

"Not powerless, if we determine to shape our fate for ourselves. Otherwise, if we let ourselves drift at the mercy of every circumstance, we may make a wreck of our own life—and others." He spoke softly, yet quickly. There seemed a swift rush of sweet thoughts through his brain, keeping time with his beating heart. He struggled against it, dreading it, only half comprehending it. "But floating here, as we are," he continued (for the blades of the sculls had by this time ceased to dip, and were now in motionless rest on the water)—"it is all so lovely, that Shelley alone can express what one feels:—

"'My soul is an enchanted boat,
Which like a sleeping swan doth float
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing;
And thine doth like an angel sit
Beside the helm conducting it,
Whilst all the winds with melody are singing.
It seems to float ever, for ever,
Upon the many-winding river,
Between mountains, woods, abysses,
A paradise of wildernesses!'"

He paused.

"Go on, please," said Claudia.

"'Till, like one in slumber bound,
Borne to the ocean, I float down, around,
Into a sea profound, of ever-spreading sound.
Meanwhile thy spirit lifts its pinions
In music's most serene dominions—
Catching the winds that fan that happy heaven.
And we sail on, away, afar,
Without a course, without a star,
But by the instinct of sweet music driven,—
Till through Elysian garden-islets
By thee, most beautiful of pilots,
Where never mortal pinnace glided,
The boat of my desire is guided—
Realms where the air we breathe is love,
Which in the winds and on the waves doth move,
Harmonising this earth with what we find above.'"

He ceased, and leant a little forward. Neither spoke. The stillness was strangely impressive, only broken now and again when little delicate bursts of music came fluttering out to sea on the wings of the wind. The moon, now pale and risen, was veiled by a film of silver cloud. The sea was dark, reflecting the overshadowing night, but the ripples were touched by a soft phosphorescent glitter. Claud suddenly realised that he was in the presence of one of the supreme moments of his life.

A calm irresistible force seemed to master him. It possessed itself of him; it impelled him to speak. And the words that he uttered flowed from him—not consciously formed by his mind, but in tones that were strange to his ear, so that he listened to them as though to a stranger speaking.

"I love you, Claudia; will you be mine?" he heard them say. And his eyes, preternaturally keen, saw her flush, and then turn very pale. His arms stretched out as though they would press her to his bosom. Then he heard her say, "Take me back—this is cruel of you;" and he saw her head bend over her hands, as she burst into tears.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I know I ought not to have spoken to you here—now."

She looked up, and with a supreme effort controlled her tears. "You had better speak to my mother," she said. "We will try and forget our mistakes."

"Forget—forget my mistake! Forgive it, for I could not help it; but do not forget it. Now you know that I love you—shall always love you. I

will speak to your mother. Till then, let us be as though nothing had happened."

"I am the victim of fate," she said, trying to smile. "I can't struggle; I am too weak, I think."

And, until they reached the shore, not another word was spoken.

CHAPTER IX.

THE whole of Pompeii had naturally gathered in the Forum for the ball. All the servants even had gone, either to help or to see as much of the fun as they could.

And therefore the outlying streets lay deserted and silent. The very breeze, which so wooingly tended the brightly lit festival and the calm sea beyond, seemed here to have turned somewhat chilly. Only the thin waning moon looked down with the same calm insistence. And by the pallid light she gave, the black shadowed silent streets might have been those of that other city she also looked down on, now standing lifeless and deserted beneath the awful shade of its lurid destroyer: a ghostly corpse, reconquered from the tomb.

Yet in one of the smaller rooms near the entrance

a light was burning. And if a wandering couple or an inquisitive passer-by had been injudicious enough to intrude, they would have found Mr Giles (who scorned balls, and indeed was unnecessary to their success) entertaining an unpleasant-looking individual with cold brandy-and-water.

We will take a sample of their conversation in order to show the reader its drift, and then pass on to pleasanter people and subjects. (And we must again remind him that this is not a history, but a romance—a romance of to-morrow—with a very different sort of Government ruling to any one we may have at the present day.)

"We don't want any more outrages—indeed we really can't do with any more, just at present," Mr Giles was saying, with a certain incisive earnestness. "The English people have short memories, and are easily fooled. If you will only stop them now, the Prime Minister will get you Home Rule. He wants it himself, and only the doubts of his Cabinet hold him back."

"The money from America is the troublesome thing," said the unpleasant-looking man. "The Americans, you see, naturally won't subscribe un-

less they are sure of their money's worth. Now a good outrage or murder, or even a dynamite explosion with nobody killed, pleases them wonderfully, and quickens up the flow of money tremendously; because then they see we are earning it fairly. A few weeks ago, for instance, when a lot of old women held another old woman down for dogs to bite and worry her legs, and that boycotted man had his ears and his cheeks sliced off with razors, the money began to come in tremendously fast, and kept up for several weeks afterwards. You know we must think of our livelihood, even before the claims of Home Rule."

"Oh, I know, I know," replied Giles, in a sympathising voice. "It's very hard on you, I allow. But can't you tell them in America you're saving up all your outrages till the Conservatives come in next time?—if they ever do. Then we can have a double supply. You'll get the money, and we shall get the advantage of their policy being a failure."

"I will try; I will do my best," said the unpleasant man. "You know we should starve if it wasn't for the subsidies." He seemed still hanker-

ing after the forbidden delights of outrage, for he continued, "If we could only now tie a landlord to a stake, and roast him slowly to death with green fagots in the midst of his native village. You've no idea what a lot of money that show would draw. Why, we should all make our fortunes, and be able to retire from business."

"Oh, you mustn't do that; pray, don't do that," cried Giles, in absolute alarm. "You've no idea how anything *definite* of that sort upsets the English people. You can't conceive what a row they'd make, or how very unreasonable they would be. It might put off Home Rule for twelve months at least. Besides which, you know, it really would be rather cruel, and the Prime Minister would be extremely annoyed—extremely annoyed; although, of course, he would understand that it was only a regrettable incident natural to the present unsatisfactory state of affairs. But even if he wished to overlook it, his colleagues wouldn't permit him to do so."

Then they fell to discussing details, which would not be of general interest, and so we will drop the curtain.

The next day arose (as each day eternally rises) alike on the evil and on the good. On Claudia, sleeping soundly after a restless night; and on Claud, waking anxiously, wondering how he should break the ice with Mrs Denbigh. He felt that the cold plunge would have to be taken without any mitigating preliminaries. And he doubted if she would extend him a helping hand. She might even retard his efforts by assisting to freeze him.

Can we not all imagine the horror of that first interview with the stern parent, even though we may never ourselves have experienced it? The pause at the door; the particular make of the carpet, which we examine so long and so earnestly; the haggard attempt at everyday conversation; the awful moment when the plunge is taken, and we feel ourselves mentally toppling down like a house of cards. Our eligibility, income, advantages, and expectations (recalled and reviewed for the occasion), now shrivel up with a horrid persistence, as we try to present each in turn in as favourable a light as possible. The parent is on the alert; all the parental instincts are aroused, and we are exposed to a pitiless scrutiny. The whole is simply

a waking nightmare, and it is no wonder that poor Claud mentally fingered it with a certain amount of dread apprehension.

As he walked along the streets—he had only a few yards to go—he did not notice the passers-by, or even the sunshine. He noticed nothing, and only knew that he was thinking, "What a fool I am going to make of myself!"

Mrs Denbigh was at home, and received him kindly. He tried to talk of the ball, of the people who were there—of anything he could think of. And although she answered him with polite responsiveness, he felt she was wondering all the while what had brought him there so early. At last he said, in a voice that was strange to himself—

"I have come to ask you, Mrs Denbigh, for a great—a great sacrifice. I have come to ask you for your daughter."

He thought that the phrase was pedantic; he wondered if it was also ludicrous. He looked at her. She was quite calm; and he had expected her to be surprised—even shocked.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "she is accustomed to receive such proposals;" and he could

not help adding, "perhaps accustomed to refuse them also."

"I admit you have taken me by surprise, Mr Brownlow," she said in a sweet voice, but without any tone to indicate the taking. "You have only known one another for such a short time. I think that before anything further occurs—I mean before you say anything to Claudia—you ought to see a great deal more of each other. Besides which, before I can sanction your suit, there are many other things to be considered."

Claud blushed. He glanced up with a pleading look in his eyes—eyes which, at times, were as eloquent as a dumb animal's—and said, "You will forgive me, I know, but—but I forgot myself last night—for a moment; I told your daughter how much I loved her."

Mrs Denbigh rose abruptly.

"What did she answer?" she asked, with a firm quickness.

"Only, 'Ask my mother,' I think."

"She is a good girl," said Mrs Denbigh, in a tone of reassured authority. "And now, Mr Brownlow, under the circumstances, I must tell you that I

consider you made a mistake; not only a mistake, but a dishonourable mistake as well."

"Dishonourable! Oh, Mrs Denbigh, not dishonourable."

His eyes almost filled with tears as he also rose.

"My love is so great that it overflowed, and now I have come to confess it all to you."

"If it is likely to overflow again, my daughter had better not run the risk of causing it by seeing you," said Mrs Denbigh, a little drily.

"But you don't—you won't tell me, I must not hope!" broke out Claud.

"You are very young. You have at present no means of supporting a wife. I speak to you quite frankly; it is the kindest way in the end."

"I will get my uncle to write to you about—about my income and prospects, and all that."

"I think that will be the best plan; but, at the same time, I must warn you that there are already others in the field."

"Already," murmured Claud. He had nothing else to say. He vaguely wondered who the others were, and if this was the way that their offers were received. But he tried to smile as he answered—

"Even yet I shall venture to hope, for she knows that I love her."

"If you speak to her in the future, it must be as a—as a slight acquaintance. It would be better to do so, than for it to appear as though we had quarrelled."

"It shall be as you wish."

"And I trust to your honour as a gentleman not to say a word more to my daughter on the subject of love till you have asked my consent."

"I promise," answered Claud. Then he looked up, and said, "Have you forgiven my indiscretion?"

"I forgive you," she said, holding out her hand (but she had not). And Claud walked out into the blinding sunlight, and on to the sea-shore, feeling as though he had been crushed and almost trampled on, and yet not being able to find where the injustice lay.

"It must be her manner," he said to himself. "Not her words, but her manner of saying them."

On the sea-shore he found Darlington. He told him all, and they wondered who the "others" could be. Neither of them remembered that prudent

mothers sometimes not only keep "others" conveniently on hand, but have been known even to go so far as to manufacture "another" out of a youthful great personage without either his knowledge or consent.

Darlington, for instance, never for a moment thought that when Mrs Denbigh talked about "others being in the field," she meant that she hoped and expected that he would be caught there. He comforted Claud, and promised to do all that he could for him with Mrs Denbigh. They were very old friends; and Darlington said in his confident way that he would use all his tact to talk Mrs Denbigh over.

So the days passed on. There were lunches on yachts, and picnics up among the vine-covered hills, where donkeys were ridden, and wild flowers picked, and oranges eaten fresh from their dark-leaved trees. There were boating-parties and driving-parties; excursions to Nice and to Monte Carlo. Whatever else there might be, there was always lawn-tennis going eternally every day, from early morning till sunset. Miss van Knut was the life of every party she joined; and she joined a

great many. She laughed and chattered (she was even known in strict private to mimic her mentors). She appeared in a great many lovely dresses, always shaded by a large parasol, and cooled by a great crimson fan. She was generally followed by Darlington, who turned up with a kind of unexpected irregular certainty. They were the best of friends, but she was more than a match for him. She chaffed him unmercifully; and if he had ever had any intention of being sentimental (which he hadn't), she would have crumpled him up and sent him home in an envelope, as she would herself have subsequently expressed it.

He had no intention of being sentimental. He was not in love; and the whole fun of the flirtation to him was its being conducted on the American principle, of no love being involved, or even implied.

As the young lady was an American young lady, of course no one could say anything; and Darlington took advantage of his privilege accordingly.

Miss van Knut, on her side, liked Darlington extremely, but it must be conceded that some of the warmth of her friendship with him was caused

by her mischievous love of witnessing the obvious alarm of all the other ladies.

We have not as yet seen anything of her father. Mr van Knut was a thin shrewd man, with a kind, worn, clever face, a black beard, now turning a little grey, and a manner which was at once both determined and unassuming. He was of course, to a certain extent, apparently effaced by his daughter, seeming at times to be rather a courier than a companion, and rather a companion than a parent. But this subordination was, after all, superficial, for in every important matter, whenever he "put his foot down," his word was law. At Pompeii he chiefly amused himself by taking long walks, his head always shaded by a big white umbrella; and he was often accompanied by one of the other gentlemen of the place. He was extremely good company. He was well-informed, and his natural shrewdness, reinforced by a certain dry humour, gave to his conversation a delightfully American flavour. Besides which, he was supposed to be a great authority on American railroads. When he and his companion were far on in their walk, and their conversation had tended towards confidence, he was often

cross-questioned upon the momentous subject of securities; the safety or danger of various "mortgage bonds" and "debenture bonds" was discussed; and not even the "ordinary stocks" were ignored, although often condemned.

Mr van Knut had struck up a great friendship with Mr Leo. The latter, although, above all things, transcendental and idealistic in his writings, was not without a certain practical common-sense in everyday affairs. Leaving entire artistic and literary consistency to his wife, he edited his Review, for instance, with decided success. He knew the worth of "names," as well as the value of ideas; of the desirability of advertisements, as well as the delight of spreading enlightened ideas among those who were willing to give sixpence a-week to receive them.

And even if his noblest and most disinterested views for the future improvement of mankind had spread with a conquering force through Society, he would still have been wholly dissatisfied had the balance between receipts and expenditure not been generously in his own favour. He therefore found Mr van Knut not only extremely useful as a kind of

exhaustless well out of which he could pump ideas on America, but also a practical person who told him where he could place in safety the earnings from all his struggles on behalf of humanity.

Mr van Knut's admiration of Mr Leo was caused by that gentleman's liberal knowledge and wide attainments. Mr van Knut had a great admiration for culture. And it was tempered by the slightest suspicion that Mr Leo was just—just a little bit of a humbug. For Mr van Knut had a brutal contempt for a humbug. His feelings towards Mrs Leo, however, were simple and entirely unmixed. They began by regarding her as a dread divinity in the world of thought, and they ended by thinking her rather a foolish woman in the world of men.

Miss Rattletubs all this time was not only writing her "Letters to a Brother," with a view to subsequent publication, but was also contributing an occasional article to the 'Morning Gazette.' She frequented Mrs Denbigh's society, partly in order to be, as she expressed it, "in touch" with the fashionable world, and partly because Mrs Denbigh was "very nice" to her. For Mrs

Denbigh, with her accustomed acuteness, recognised "a power" in Miss Rattletubs, and she always propitiated "a power" when she found one.

Claudia spent most of her time with her mother. She knew instinctively that Claud had been discouraged. She also knew that she did not love him—or rather, she thought that she did not, and told herself so, when she ventured to think of him; for what maiden knows her own heart at the moment it flutters before the first rush of hot love from another's? She dare not let her mind dwell on the tender events of that lovely evening. She only felt that the memory of them was filled with a wistful sweetness. Claud haunted the secret chambers of her heart, and would not be put forth. And if she, in truth, almost cherished him there, it was wholly unconsciously, for she believed she expelled him whenever his yearning face and his burning words rose up in opposed recollection. She was a little weary of all the gaiety. Pompeii was really too gay. She was restless, and longed to return to England; so that when Mrs Denbigh told her one day that they were invited to afternoon tea with

the Princess Chioggia, she accepted the news with indifference, and even forgot to consider what dress she should wear.

The Princess Chioggia was one of the handsomest women in Europe. She was a Hungarian, who had married a Roman prince; but her sphere of activity was not confined to the little round of scanty duties, and scantier pleasures, which is usually trodden so circumspectly by Italian ladies. For not only was she one of the handsomest women in Europe, but she also had one of the finest physiques as well, with a carriage—a *manière*—more regal than that of most royal princesses themselves. Yet, although in Society she was, above all things, a princess, she climbed mountains in Switzerland, hunted in England, swam splendidly, rode exquisitely, and danced divinely.

Her beautiful rooms were now thronged with people at afternoon tea. The inner room was built in exact imitation of one of the courts at Pompeii. In the centre, a marble basin of clear water in which gold-fish swam, reflected the sky above. The marble floor was covered with Eastern rugs. The red-tinted walls were sprinkled with rosy Cupids

and baby-loves archly playing amid a delightful jumble of grinning masks, delicate flowers, and antique arabesques.

Rich curtains hung over the doorways, at intervals pushed aside when some nineteenth-century worldling was ushered in by (what looked like) a beautiful young Greek slave, dressed in a cream-coloured tunic, and crowned with a wreath of white lilac.

There were already a crowd of people assembled before the curtain was once again pulled back and Darlington entered. When he had found the Princess, and said all that is usual on such an occasion, he wandered on until he settled down by Miss van Knut. She would not talk to him before he had fetched her an ice. At last he came back with two (having captured one for himself as well), and then she resigned herself to a long conversation.

"What fools those fellows look dressed up like that!" Darlington began. "Why can't they have the servants here dressed in a proper livery?"

"That would spoil it all. I think they're just lovely. I'm afraid you've no soul for art."

"No, I don't think I have much."

"Neither have I, between ourselves—at least I'm not struck dumb with awe by Botticelli or Carpaccio."

"I don't know who they are."

"Ah! you see, I'm more cultured than you. But then I've travelled in Italy and improved my mind. I shocked Mrs Leo the other day, when she said that the angels in the round Botticelli at Florence were bending their heads in adoring unison, by saying that I was certain they'd just screwed them down on one side simply to get in the frame. And what do you think she said?" Miss van Knut went on, mimicking her manner in the most delightful way. "She said, '*You* would naturally expect angels to compress themselves into a frame.' So I replied, 'Oh no, I'm quite content when ladies do so.'. You know what I mean," she said, looking at Darlington.

And Darlington did, for he burst out laughing.

Miss van Knut having touched on her point, glided off, and returned once more to the scene around them. "This may be art; but in spite of that, it's awfully pretty (why I dislike most art is, that it's so terribly ugly), and we might be dear old Romans again."

"That is what Claud is always saying—'the classical life revived,' and that sort of thing. But I don't want the classical life revived, and I should hate to be a dear old Roman."

"Mr Brownlow hasn't looked so cheerful the last day or two."

"Can you guess why?"

"Yes."

"I'm sure you can't."

"I can—because he is in love."

"How do you know?" cried Darlington in astonishment.

"Oh, I know, I know; *I* have got a pair of eyes. And I could tell you the lady too, if I wished to be indiscreet."

"I can't think why the mother discourages it," said Darlington.

"I can. She has another young gentleman in view."

"Who?"

"That would be telling still more than I ought. The other day the young lady's mother asked me what I thought of a certain young man. I told her that I thought him just simply—well, I won't

say what I said. She asked me to excuse her speaking plainly to me; but as I had no mother, and wasn't a European (I am sure she thinks I am really a savage, and tattooed underneath my clothes), she was sure—and so on, and so on. I ought to know that it wasn't usual in England for young ladies to call the sons of peers simply sweet: besides, in this instance the young man was not —was not quite free."

"You don't mean to say she had the impertinence to talk about me like that. What does she mean by saying I'm not free?" cried Darlington, angrily.

"So I replied," continued Miss van Knut, not taking any notice of the interruption, "'You are quite right, Mrs Denbigh. And next time he's free, I'll let you know.'"

"But what can she mean about me?" persisted Darlington.

"She thinks you are in love with her daughter, and therefore she has discouraged Claud. Now I want you to be very serious for once, and talk business with me, Lord Darlington," Miss van Knut continued, with a confidential air. "We must appear as though—well, as though we were nearly

engaged, and then she will give you up and encourage Claud."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Darlington.

"But mind it is only acting—only pretence. I put you, sir, on your honour, never to take advantage of my generosity—I mean of my ingenuity."

"What a capital joke! What a score off Mrs Denbigh! And I can't help laughing when I think of my mother's face."

"Your mother!"

"Yes; she reckons to superintend all my *amours*, you know. She asks likely girls down to stay at Fieldhurst—that's our place in the country—and all that sort of thing."

"But your mother mustn't ever hear of this. It is only for a few days, in order to conquer Mrs Denbigh. See, she is sitting over there now." Miss van Knut's eyes sparkled with fun. "Go over," she said, "and just hint it to her, and see how she looks."

Darlington sprang up. Miss van Knut tried to stop him, but it was too late. Besides a mischievous delight in shocking Mrs Denbigh, he wished at the moment to pay her out for retain-

ing him, as it were. So he quietly walked up to her and said, in a *nonchalant* tone, "I have come, Mrs Denbigh, for your congratulations. I'm engaged to Miss van Knut."

Mrs Denbigh caught her breath for a moment; and then, in the sweetest voice and with the kindest smile, she said, "I wish you all happiness, Darlington. Take me to Miss van Knut, that I may congratulate her—on her success."

Darlington gravely led Mrs Denbigh across the room. But before they had come to where Miss van Knut had been sitting, she jumped up and came forward to meet them. She blushed a little, and said hurriedly, "I hope Lord Darlington hasn't been saying anything silly."

"Nothing silly," replied Mrs Denbigh, in a clear slow voice. "On the contrary, he has been telling me of your engagement, and I have come to congratulate you."

Miss van Knut turned on Darlington, and in a tone in which amusement struggled unsuccessfully with distress, she said, "Lord Darlington, I am very angry at your being so silly." Then turning to Mrs Denbigh, she went on—

"It is only one of his foolish jests. I am afraid he has been playing a sort of childish practical joke on both of us, Mrs Denbigh."

Mrs Denbigh was deeply shocked. She was filled with a general impression of the extreme impropriety, the more than suggested vulgarity, of the whole scene. She felt sure in her own mind that somehow it was all due to Miss van Knut. Probably that young lady had first played a practical joke on Darlington, by suggesting to him the suitability of his making himself her husband. So that it was with rising indignation she turned to Miss van Knut and said—

"Whether it is a theoretical or a practical joke, Miss van Knut, it is obviously one in which no young lady should—I may say could—participate. Although, Lord Darlington, you are too young to appreciate either the value or the worthlessness of young ladies, you can at least understand that your joke has placed us all in a very unpleasant situation."

Darlington, blushing and filled with confusion, looked from one to the other. He was not sure if Miss van Knut was really pained, or if she was simply controlling her sense of the ludicrous. He

knew that he wanted to get rid of Mrs Denbigh, and he did not mend matters by telling her that if she would only leave them, he would find out whether he had been premature. Miss van Knut had flamed up at Mrs Denbigh's words. She thought that they skilfully covered an insult, and her voice trembled slightly as she said—

"In America, Mrs Denbigh, it would be considered more considerate, kinder, even better bred, for a lady to accept a scene like this in the spirit in which it was offered—especially when the joke, though a poor one, was at another lady's expense."

Mrs Denbigh turned round and retraced her steps, with a firm determination to let Darlington's mother, the Countess of Downstreamdown, know *everything* with as little delay as possible. Indeed, Miss van Knut was so charmingly original, so daringly unconventional, she wore such extraordinary dresses with such a fascinating air, and was altogether so unusual—unusually charming, most of the men said—that Mrs Denbigh was not the only lady who regarded her with an air of extreme disapproval. They said to each other, "These American girls will do *anything*, and say *anything* also."

By which they meant that Miss van Knut was capable of saying anything—even something unpleasant—about themselves. And they always seemed to tacitly imply that she was really a savage, who might at any moment be expected to burst through the thin veneer that civilisation had covered her with, and appear in her native war-paint and feathers. The Duchess of Man, for instance—herself a lady who, if she had been simply Mrs So-and-so, would have probably been refused admission to any respectable household—remarked to Mr Smythe that Miss van Knut was not at all a nice girl, and that she really ought to have been blackballed. Mr Smythe in reply asked what he could do. He had already done everything that he could to protect Society from being invaded by a horde of Americans, and he had failed. Besides which, the Van Knuts had been elected in America, and in America they were probably a kind of criterion of suitability. When he himself had been in America, he had found that conduct like Miss van Knut's was not only accepted, but even encouraged.

"I shall certainly never allow such a person in my house," said the Duchess of Man.

And the determination would have been more than reciprocated if the knowledge of each other's conduct had also been equally reciprocal. For Miss van Knut was extremely unworldly, and was quite unprepared to admit (even if she had known it) that an exalted position has not only its duties but its privileges as well, and that one of the most valued of these is an understanding that its friends will be suitably blind and deaf to, and ignorant of, certain events on certain occasions. Mr Smythe understood perfectly when to hide anything awkward with the sheltering cloak of charity, and when to exhibit it, magnified large through a telescope, to all the curious crowds that were gathered around. He knew exactly what Society would and would not stand from whom. But Society's standard was not Miss van Knut's. Her views of both conduct and opinion were formed quite independently of it. They not only did not vary in accord with discovery, but they were sufficiently unsuitable not even to vary with the person concerned; and therefore it is no wonder if Society looked a little askance at a young lady whose views defied

its control, and did not courteously vibrate in response to its convenience.

At the present moment Miss van Knut was not troubling her head about the frowns of Society (if at any moment such frowns could ever have alarmed her); for she was scolding Darlington for his gaucheness in placing them both in a false position. And he was protesting that he had done it entirely at her instigation. After a little dispute, they finally settled that for the future they would be such good friends as to keep Mrs Denbigh in constant despair, and at the same time would be discreetly vague about any declared engagement.

"For if we were definitely engaged, we should have definitely to break it off after Claudia was all right—we should have to assign reasons and pretexts for having quarrelled, and all that kind of thing; and you know what a bore that would be," said Miss van Knut. And Darlington acquiesced—as indeed he always did; for when he remarked that he did not see the necessity for the conclusion, he was told if he ever spoke like that again, he would spoil the whole plot by forfeiting once for all the friendship of Miss van Knut.

Tottie, fluttering about through the groups, was busy collecting and depositing small drops of scandal. He was now heard exclaiming that he wanted a chaperon to take him to the refreshment-room, as he didn't understand Italian, and was afraid to face the waiters alone. The pantomimic actions with which he accompanied these words showed that they were intended for humour, and some people put on a smile in consequence.

"That sweet child is crying out for his nurse and his feeding-bottle," said Miss van Knut to Darlington.

Mawnan, who was standing by Claud, remarked that the youth made him sick, and added that he was positively a little Clodius.

To which Claud replied that he must not forget that Clodius had some brains, and that if any one here was like Clodius, he thought it was Flashington.

Claud then looked round; and seeing Claudia sitting alone, he walked towards her, and began to make that bodiless, soulless conversation which people seem doomed to construct together when there is a feeling of restraint between them, and

they happen to meet in public as merely casual acquaintances.

He had talked on for some time, he himself hardly knew about what, when he heard a few sentences near him which made him start and listen.

One speaker said, "Is he furious?" And the other one answered, "Yes, furious. The Cabinet have wired for explanations, and he is going back to England to-night." "But what did the paper say?" asked the first. "Oh, the paper said that he had determined to give Home Rule to India, and that if the Cabinet did not approve, he would force it on them by means of agitation. Then it went on in the usual strain. Mr Cade explained that until India was finally given up, England would never really cease to be an aristocratic country. But with India once again free, and England absolved from the crime of holding down in bondage more than 250 millions of our fellow-men in worse than the chains of slavery — and so on, and so on—we should be able, once for all, to give up our so-called imperial policy (merely a policy for providing the imbecile younger sons

of the upper classes with sinecures), reduce the navy, almost abolish the army, and turn our attention to those crying reforms at home which are so often neglected in order to interfere with our neighbours abroad. Cade is not only furious, but he says that he knows who has betrayed him."

Claud felt his heart almost stop. He turned to Claudia. "Have you heard what that man has been saying?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Yes; very much the same as you told me the other night."

"Then you did not repeat it, did you? I am sure that you did not," whispered Claud, in a voice so distressed it was almost a soundless cry.

"No, not a word," answered Claudia, simply. "You told me, you know, it was private."

Claud felt the clouds roll away, and his beating heart warming him once again, as he said, "Then he must have been betrayed by some one else. The paper seems to have given a very exaggerated account of what passed; for he is quite clever enough not to commit himself in that violent way, at first." Claud looked round the room, and found

the 'Morning Gazette.' There, under the startling heading of—

MR CADE AND M. COURIER:
A HOME-RULE SCHEME FOR INDIA;
FULL DETAILS—

he was astonished to see that not only everything which he had heard was put down, but that there was at least a column and a half devoted to the interview. The report was exaggerated, and in many parts very incorrect; and yet Claud felt that it could not have been invented. One of the three people present during the interview must have repeated what passed there. Claud had told no one but Claudia, and she had respected his confidence. Cade would not betray himself; and therefore Claud decided that M. Courier must be the culprit. "Well, it is nothing to me," he said to himself. "He and Cade must settle their business between them;" and he dismissed it henceforth from his thoughts.

CHAPTER X.

MISS RATTLETUBS had not been idle since she came to Pompeii. She knew that all this "effete Society," as she called it, was soon to be doomed to destruction—indeed she candidly told it so. Her triumphant prophecies of its approaching dissolution almost raised her to the rank of a female Jonah. Meanwhile she found it very pleasant to participate in everything (under protest and with due denunciation) that was going on around. She was a great political as well as a great social reformer. Her friends said that she was a thoroughly dependable "platform woman"—which meant that when any one was getting up anything, to protest against something which they happened to dislike, she might be relied on to take a chair on the platform and a prominent part in the proceedings. She was pre-

pared to assist the Radicals in suppressing all liberty, and at the same time to protest against the State being allowed to enforce vaccination. She was anxious to convert every one to teetotalism, so that they might shut up all the public-houses at all times. She wished to see women with seats in Parliament as well as with a vote, in order that that body might be both more efficient and more expeditious than it is at present. She followed Mr Cade about, and tried to engage him in conversation; but he, for his part, generally tried to be engaged elsewhere. So she had to fall back on Mr Giles. "We women want to help in the fray," she used to say to him; "you might at least let us get into the Caucus."

Mr Giles thought that their most useful work would be influencing the people by agitation outside.

Miss Rattletubs agreed, and then proposed the brilliant idea that they should establish a Daisy League, to cut out that nasty ridiculous Primrose rubbish. She had, as we have before seen, a great belief in badges and ribbons, and other outward and tangible signs of inward regeneration. She was

distressed that the whole delightful paraphernalia —the habitations, the titles, the badges, and the flowers—should be devoted to upholding such a vague and antiquated thing as the Constitution.

"If the Constitution can be supported by a primrose, it can surely be destroyed by a daisy," she cried; while she began vigorously to organise the league—or rather to try and organise it, for Pompeii proved obdurate; thus giving another sign of the degenerate and reactionary tendency of its patrons.

Even Mr Leo seemed to throw cold water on her plan when she unrolled it to him. He told her that he considered politics too serious and delicate a science to be intrusted to a league. And when she assured him that the Conservatives had gained a great many votes by theirs, he was disinterested enough to reply that even in that case there was no necessity to follow their example.

"The Constitution, as we have it at the present time, is the natural development and the logical sequence of the 'Constitutions of Clarendon.' We propose to abolish once for all the remnants of the feudal system (the remains of which still clog

our every action), and in fact to neutralise the Norman Conquest. Now do you think that a Daisy League could accomplish this?" he asked, in an airy voice.

"Of course that is just what a thoroughly practical hard-working league like this could and would do," put in Miss Rattletubs, with brisk determination. "We could throw ourselves into the cause, and make it our very first business, as you say, to agitate against, and to finally abolish, the Norman Conquest."

But Mr Leo sadly shook his head.

Miss Rattletubs, however, found a warm supporter in an unlooked-for quarter. The brilliant Flashington—who made it his business to be nice to every one, including the most unpromising—had taken Miss Rattletubs "up," as the phrase goes. This effort was to him a more onerous one than might have been expected; for it included the acceptance of her "sanitary soap"—soap guaranteed on the label to be as "cleansing as a Turkish bath." He had even tried (once) her "non-alcoholic, syrupy, temperance stimulants," and had received, as a concession to male weakness, one of

her "anti-tobacco cigars (warranted to be entirely free from the leaf of that poisonous plant)."

He swallowed these gifts (metaphorically) in order to get the organisation of the Daisy League under his control. He was just converted to Liberalism (not having been won over, we are sorry to say, by its obvious righteousness and inherent truth, but by its present success and the prospect of its future unconditional triumph). He was determined always to be on the winning side, no matter what that side might be; and it is possible that in the future—even the near future, if we progress at the present rate—the elegant Flashington will be seen crowned with a scarlet cap and leading a riotous mob on the West End. At the present moment, however, anything of the sort is premature; and therefore Flashington—who loved above all things to be of importance—contented himself with hurrying about as though the fate of the empire (which he was doing his little—his very little—to injure) depended on his exertions.

He was anxious to begin a "political career," and he foresaw that the Daisy League would be

the very thing to give him notoriety; for we know that nowadays notoriety is not only the first step towards success, but has come to supersede all other attributes, and is the one, and only one, quality absolutely essential to gain that end.

Flashington had seized an early opportunity for consulting with Giles as to his future conduct.

He had taken him for a long walk; and when they had found a shady nook beneath some trees, and Giles was provided with one of Flashington's own cigars, he opened the subject by asking Giles what was the best thing to do in order to get a "seat."

"I used to be a Conservative at Eton and Oxford; but I see it won't do any longer," he added, frankly. "The landed interest and that sort of thing are played out; and I mean to succeed."

"Capital—capital," answered Giles, giving him a friendly slap on the back. "I think we can manage to do something for you, if you go in for being extreme."

"Yes; I'll be as extreme as you like."

"It is better to begin as extreme as you can. You must be docile to your Caucus; but try, if any-

thing, to go a little beyond them. That is the first rule for success. The second is, that you must be a thorough party man. Always vote with your leaders on all occasions, no matter what you've said, or what they propose — that is, of course, unless the Caucus tells you not to. Above all things, try and manufacture a 'mandate'; for if you can manufacture a 'mandate' you will be irresistible, and no Government will venture to refuse you anything that you may want. And there's another thing: I wouldn't, if I were you, be too conscientious—too scrupulous,—you understand me. For instance, if you've happened to state in a speech, for party purposes, that the Tories are in league with Irish traitors and murderers, and you have denounced them for betraying their country; and then, if we happened to find it convenient a short time afterwards really to do what we had accused them of doing,—of course you would vote with your party, and say that events had changed, if it was necessary to say anything at all, which it wouldn't be, because the Caucus would quite understand that under the circumstances no questions had better be asked."

"Oh, of course!" said Flashington, cheerfully (and we may do him the justice to believe that he was already such a thorough "party man" that what some old-fashioned people might consider the dishonourableness of such conduct never for a moment struck him); "I know the great thing nowadays is to be practical. If one is too consistent, one simply becomes *doctrinaire*, like the dear old 'Spectator.'"

"I used to take in the 'Spectator'; but I never found that it did me much good, and now it's gone and made a fool of itself too. However, to return to our subject. If you're very extreme and very active, you've no idea how fast you'll get on. All the moderate men are passed over now; and they'll push you on, partly through fear and partly through love, till you may find yourself in the Cabinet." Mr Giles warmed with the congenial nature of his theme. "Look at me! I'm to have the next safe seat. Well, I'm certain to be in the next Liberal Government (they daren't keep me out if they wanted to)—probably in the Cabinet; and though I have risen from the ranks, I labour under the disadvantage of not being a working man," added

Mr Giles, thoughtfully. "Well, you'll simply have to be all the more extreme, in order to cancel the disadvantage of your birth and training."

"Why shouldn't I go in for being a sort of Alcibiades?" Flashington asked. But Giles did not catch the allusion, so he continued—

"Learning and all that sort of thing pays sometimes. Look at Buckle, for instance. He's been popped straight into the Cabinet, not because he knows anything about public affairs, but simply because of his literary abilities." Giles was quite right. Buckle was a man who had passed most of his life immersed in study. He expressed, in an extremely brilliant style, his ideas on the philosophy of last century and the politics of this. His chief knowledge of life and affairs had been gathered out of the best books of the past, and then given forth in a few good books of the present. This (fictitious) Minister had been called "an up-stairs politician" by a sneering Tory—a trite enough joke, but perhaps as good as could be expected, when we remember that it is a commonplace of the other party that they possess a monopoly of wit and humour. He had probably already the drafts of two or three

amended constitutions for England written out in pencil, and stowed away in his bureau. He gave the very finest literary finish to a Cabinet much in need of finish, and he displayed a dispensing policy, for which there was also a vacancy, by declaring that he should use his discretion as to when he should permit the law to be enforced and when allow it to be broken. "Lastly," said Giles, summing up, "always remember who are really 'the governing classes.' See what will tempt them, and promise them that. At the same time, keep the upper and middle classes amused with phrases; for if they once took fright and combined against the governing classes, where should we be?"

They went on to discuss the line which it would be best for Flashington immediately to pursue. He was to join the National Liberal Club at once,—Giles told him that Brooks's was much worse than useless,—and then the Committee would "run" him if they thought he seemed a likely man. He went back radiant at the prospect of being of so much use to his party and to himself; and the very next morning he started for England, in order to put his plans into execution.

The same afternoon Claudia, strolling along the beach, had fallen in with the children of the Princess Chioggia. They ran up to her, and implored her to tell them fairy stories, with all the demonstrative affection and unconscious grace of small Italians.

"You will tell us some more pretty stories, will you not?" the boys cried, themselves looking like little princes in a fairy story, with their long hair, their lovely faces, and their high-bred yet perfectly childlike bearing.

"And it must be quite true," added the tiny Princess Marie,—a child so exquisitely beautiful that she seemed to be of no distinctive type or nationality, but simply a little vision of almost angelic perfection, astray from some far-off world of poet's dream and painter's fancy.

Claudia smilingly assented. She seated herself on an old piece of timber, washed ashore from some winter wreck. She took Marie on her knee, and the boys clustered round; while she began to tell them the saddest and most poetical of all fairy stories—Andersen's "Little Mermaid."

They listened breathlessly when they heard how

the gentle little one rose up from her coral home in the depths of the sea, to breathe the fresh air and see the fair world above; how she loved the beautiful prince, and saved him, his dear head unconsciously resting all night on her bosom. They thrilled at the dread and gruesome visit to the awful sorceress, through that weird jungle of horrid ravenous sea-plants that stretched out their hungry arms, thirsting to suck her blood; and at the burning potion that turned the poor little sea maiden into a wistful, speechless, suffering woman. And when the end came—when she sat on deck, on through the long night hours, now hopeless, still soulless, unloved, broken-hearted, and then silently sank into the dark waters, to fade into drifting foam—their eyes filled with tears. And not till they learnt that the little heart of the maiden had earned a soul at last, were they comforted.

The boys crept close to Claudia, and leant their heads against her, with the pretty caressing ways of Italian affection. "Tell us another—another story," said the little Marie.

So Claudia told them the story of a little

princess who lived, once upon a time, in a vast granite castle, far off in a distant country, where endless woods sank away to unknown mountains. A malignant, uninvited fairy arrived at her christening; and after the fairy had asked to kiss the child, and was refused, she slowly said:—

"The first kiss that she gives will seal her fate for aye,
For either they must wed, or one of them must die;"

and then departed.

The king and queen dissembled their grief and forebodings. They decreed that all kisses should be henceforth punished with death, and the little princess was brought up without knowing even a parent's embrace. But she could not be wholly reared as a virtual child-prisoner. So sometimes, on the long summer days, they allowed her to wander away into the woods, where everything seemed to slumber through all the hot slow afternoon, lulled by the heat into silence.

One day when she was resting, for the warmth had made her feel a little languid, she saw a poor farmer's boy trying to carry a load too heavy for his strength.

She called him to her, and asked him if he could not find some one to help him to carry his burden.

And when he had told her that he was an orphan, and bound to a cruel farmer, who treated him badly, she felt her heart fill with pity—for before this she had always believed that every one in the world was happy, or at least had an evening meal, and a soft white bed to sleep in—and she offered him, with a sudden shyness of shame, a little money (it was all that she had), to get himself something, if he could, that would comfort him, and perhaps remind him of her sometimes.

He looked up with his eyes swimming over with thanks, and told her that never before had he known any kindness—not even a kiss.

And when she asked him to tell her what that might be, he blushed, and answered shyly that when people love one another they kiss.

"Then you must kiss me," said the little princess. He looked at her with his hungry eyes filled with loving adoration, but he did not move—only the blush on his cheeks still deepened.

"You do not love me," cried the little princess.

A light leapt to his eyes, and swept downwards over his burning face, as he seized her hand and kissed it. Then the little princess leant forward quite simply, and gently kissed him on the forehead.

At that moment she felt herself snatched from behind. She was seized by a frightened attendant, and found she was being half led, half carried back to the castle. Her natural questions were answered by awful assertions — from which she gathered that if the kiss she had given were ever revealed, she would certainly die.

And so she concealed the remembrance, even as though it were some stolen treasure, far away in the lofts of memory, and guarded it there with silence, through the years that skim by so swiftly when winged with youth.

The years passed by; but the princess slowly faded, and her face was veiled with a delicate pallor. She lay, uncomplaining, all day on her little couch, like an ailing flower, shrinking by slow degrees, and life almost seeming to shiver away in her mute and drooping helplessness.

One night when the castle was hushed and the hour was auspicious, the malignant fairy rose up once more to affright the waking king and queen with these muttered words:—

> "The princess has been kissed; and as I said,
> She dies, or he dies, or the two must wed."

The king and queen, in terror and despair, questioned and requestioned their daughter, until at last she yielded up her secret, and they learnt the dreadful truth.

They went forth, not trusting others with the errand, and found the boy at work among the hay — for it was early summer — mowing, and singing to himself an old-world tale of love, as the cool grass sank down before his scythe.

And standing there in the flowery meadow, bright with the noonday warmth, they told him that he must give up his life, or the little princess would die.

The poor boy looked on them awestruck, as he might have looked upon avenging gods charged with a Nemesis irrevocable and inevitable as the tomb.

The memory of that golden day long ago had always been to him like the love for some dear companion, born in pondering day-dreams; and now that he learnt that his life must be sacrificed to that one single kiss (for he was too simple and faithful hearted to doubt or question the king's assertion), he felt he could lay it down as gladly as if it were given for friend or brother. He only asked that some one might care for his humble dog, giving it food every day and a shelter at night. And when they had promised, he added a whispered request that before he died they would let him see the little princess once more.

The following day, as the sun was setting, they led him beneath the oriel window in whose shadow she lay so quietly, gazing with dreamy eyes towards the rosy fires of the West.

The poor boy, with his dog at his heels, walked very slowly, and gazed upwards with a wistful adoration, as he would have looked had some white-faced angel come down to him from the bright skies above.

He felt, for perhaps the first time in his life, all the sweetness of living—of simply being; and clinging

to life as he had never clung before, he was filled with a sudden yearning that she would give him but one swift look before he passed on—for ever.

She turned round; she saw the boy, and gave him a smile of recognition. Lit up by the sunset, to him it seemed divine in its radiance; and he passed on to death, reconciled by the sweet thought that she knew him, although she might never know that her life was saved by his.

In a dank and tangled corner of the forest, he found the cruel blood-red berries of a poisonous plant. He carried them to the place where, on that fair summer's afternoon, they once had met. There, after he had eaten them, he stretched himself upon the damp moss; only the slightest shiver, now and again, proclaimed that he was entering into the shadowy pathways of his final sleep. And when the thin blue mist of evening floated up around him, his loving dog still licked his face with dumb reiteration.

As soon as the princess saw the boy pass by, she felt a sudden rush of glad surprise, of happy recollection, and told her parents that he must come and see her. She added that if he were by, if she

might sometimes talk with him, she thought she should get stronger soon. The king and queen, to quiet her, murmured, "Perhaps to-morrow." And when the morrow came, they still replied, "To-morrow."

The princess gradually grew stronger, and her parents knew that the spell was working and the curse was departing. One day, when she had wandered beyond her wont, she came across a little graveyard, quiet and overgrown — almost pathetically green with long desertion: only one grave was new, and on it lay a dog, weak but still faithful to his loving watch. She hastened forward over the rank impeding grasses to where the kind old dog was lying quite exhausted.

And then, suddenly recognising in him the one companion of his little master, she threw herself down upon the powdery earth beside him and covered his head with her kisses,—a stray tear or two, it may be, mingling in their fall.

She returned to the castle, the poor dog humbly following her, perhaps knowing instinctively that she was his only friend. But from that day she slowly faded; and at last, on one calm morning very

early, she too entered into the dim land from which no mortal ever passes hence.

"And thus we see," said Claudia, in conclusion, "that if we shirk our duty and neglect our opportunities for doing kindnesses, in the hope of gaining some advantage, we still are punished for our selfishness."

"You tell us such sad stories," said the eldest boy. His eyes had filled with tears, but now were bright with returning expectation.

"Tell us something about giants and dwarfs," suggested the little maiden.

But Claudia got up, and answered that perhaps another day she would tell them funny stories. Now they had had enough, and she suggested they should walk with her back along the beach.

They had not gone far before they spied an artist painting. Claudia warned them not to go too near, as he was busy; and then, after they, not heeding her words, had run up to him, she saw that it was Redburn.

He looked up as though he had been caught in the midst of some of the occult tricks of his profession, and said, a little apologetically—

"I have only just begun—a little study, you see, of sea and shore."

"But we can't see any picture," cried the children, in all the frank outspokenness of childhood.

He looked up at them.

"Ah, I see you want some people and boats in the foreground," he said.

Claudia asked him quickly if he did not paint in the most advanced French style. And he answered that he supposed he was *dans le mouvement*, as the French say.

"Some of the modern French painters say they see no black in nature, and some cannot see any shadow; can they?" asked Claudia. "Perhaps soon," she added, "they will not be able to see any form either."

"Well, you know, I can't see outlines in nature; at least, I can't see any when I nearly close my eyes," said Redburn, cheerfully. "It's very convenient when one's drawing is weak; and one is able to give up the whole of one's attention to *tone*, to the *values*. Though, as Miss van Knut said the other day, 'She could conceive that, even in spite of that, my pictures might not have very

much value after all.' But then, you know," he added, with a smile, "she laughs at Botticelli; so what can I expect?" For Redburn was a very rare example of a painter who does not take his own work too seriously, and who is quite prepared to joke a little at the expense of his own painting. When Claudia asked him if he had done much since he had been at Pompeii, he replied that he had only done a few little studies for Dowdeswells —"One must keep one's pot a-boiling, you know" —and that he had to start in a day or two, as they wanted him for polo at Hurlingham.

He turned back to his study—a grey-green sea against a grey-blue sky, with a grey-white foreground of sandy shore, upon which a few grey and ragged thistles, subdued to a right tone and a faultless *value*, stood out discreetly.

"Come," said Claudia to the children, "we must not hinder Mr Redburn any longer;" and the little party retraced their steps along the shore, with the sunset glow behind them, and the welcoming lights of Pompeii now beginning to appear as points of fire across the intervening stretch of sandy beach, to hasten their returning footsteps.

CHAPTER XI.

For several days after his interview with Mrs Denbigh, Claud had been unable to speak to his uncle about his future prospects, because that gentleman had been absent from Pompeii, having gone to Genoa for a little change of air.

One morning he discovered that Lord St Kevan had returned, by receiving a little note from him, which contained a request that he would be kind enough to visit him as soon as possible.

"Holloa!" said Claud to himself—"he seems as anxious to see me as I am to see him;" and he took up his hat and made his way quickly to his uncle's rooms.

He found him standing in what his irreverent nephews used to call "his senatorial attitude"—his feet slightly apart, his back well to the wall,

and his hands stowed comfortably away beneath his coat-tails. "Young men nowadays don't know what to do with their hands," Lord St Kevan was wont to remark, "so they put them into their trouser-pockets. If trousers go out of fashion—or I should rather say, if trouser-pockets go out of fashion—where will their hands be then?"

This was the way he sometimes gave expression to his opinions, for it must not for a moment be supposed that he indulged in any language of the kind on this particular occasion. Claud thought that his uncle looked at him coldly, almost sternly, as he came in, and he began to wonder what his offence could possibly be.

"I am very glad you sent for me," he said, "because I have been wanting to speak to you, for several days."

"In that case, your affair shall have the precedence, as mine perhaps is both newer and less pleasant." Lord St Kevan's manner was perfectly courteous; but Claud seemed to detect a certain underground current of irritation, which he knew boded ill for his enterprise, and which from the outset had made him feel nervous. The old feel-

ing that he was going to make a fool of himself, took possession of him. He always considered that the sooner the plunge into anything disagreeable is made, the sooner it will be over; so he said quite simply—

"I am in love."

"In love!" echoed Lord St Kevan, with only the very slightest emphasis of exclamation in his voice.

"Yes, with Miss Denbigh. I think you know her a little. Her mother, to whom I have spoken, said that—well, that she must know more about my prospects before she could allow it to go any further." Claud began to feel very uncomfortable, he hardly knew why, as he continued, "And so I told her that I would speak to you about them."

"Then she considers that your prospect of success at the Bar is problematical, and wants to know if there is any securer basis for matrimony; is that so?"

"I suppose so."

"You yourself," continued Lord St Kevan, in his measured tones, with the seemingly inevitable

sequence of sentences following each other with quiet certainty—"you yourself, perhaps, also share her views?"

"I am in love," repeated Claud—that at the moment was all he could think of saying; and then he added, "and of course I want to marry—to marry as soon as possible."

He knew that the remark was inconsequent; but he could not remind his uncle that he had always been treated and regarded by him, not indeed as his legal heir, because he was a second son, but as the heir to a large part of his private fortune. Yet his uncle seemed to be trying to drive him to this declaration, perhaps only to deny the assertion when made.

"You have been brought up with certain expectations, I know; but I also had reserved certain expectations for myself as well. For instance, I had always hoped that you would some day represent the family—the family interest and principles—in Parliament. I had hoped we might perhaps soon have been able to obtain for you some minor post in the Government; I had even ventured to hope that some day you might have formed an alliance

with one of our own families;" and the way Lord St Kevan said "our own families" was an epitome, as it were, of all the aristocratic traditions of his race. "But you will find," he continued, "as I have done, that in this life we are doomed to disappointment."

He walked two or three times up and down the room; then he stopped in front of Claud, and said in a changed voice, "I will write to Mrs Denbigh; but my answer to you will perhaps depend on your answer to me."

He took out a letter from his pocket, and his voice became drier and drier—so dry that it might have been extended before some internal fire—as he said, "I have received this letter this morning from Mr Cade; perhaps you can explain its contents to me;" and he handed it to Claud. It ran as follows:

"DEAR LORD ST KEVAN,—When I was at Pompeii the other day, I had a private interview with M. Courier, at which your nephew Mr Brownlow was the only person present besides ourselves. In the course of conversation I expressed to M. Courier

my hope that at some future date we might see our way to giving India a certain amount of autonomy. Four days after this, a long and exaggerated account of the interview appeared in the 'Morning Gazette,' although it had been perfectly understood that the conversation was of a strictly private character. The Cabinet were extremely annoyed; and though the 'Daily Letterpress' inserted a paragraph, at my suggestion, wholly denying the truth of what had been stated, I was forced to return to England in order to furnish them with explanations. I have long known that malignant lies and unscrupulous dishonour have been the determining factors of the Tory policy; and I should not therefore have been surprised at your nephew's betraying me, or, indeed, have troubled you with this letter, had I not felt that it was a duty to inform you, an old and valued member of our party, that your nephew, in deserting the principles of his family, has also abandoned their practices.—I am, yours truly, WILLIAM CADE."

"How dare he write such an impudent letter—such an impudent letter—as that! As though I should condescend to publish his confidential

treason in the newspapers!" Claud was trembling with fury and excitement. He had sprung up long before this.

He was now beginning to tear the hateful letter into fragments.

"I wish to keep that letter," said Lord St Kevan quietly. "I know that in asking you if it were true, I was merely complying with a form. For I am sure that you could have told nobody what had passed." Then he added, "Of course I am right in my supposition; you have told nobody?"

"Nobody—nobody except a young lady," said Claud.

"*Except* a young lady!" The tone again had altered. The emphasis was ominous.

"And she has told no one. I will stake my life on that."

"In telling that young lady such a secret, you did a dishonourable act. I do not know if your new Tory principles are such as Mr Cade has stated—are part and parcel of that party—but this I do know, that whether your young lady did or did not respect your communication, I shall never be able to reply to Cade that you have repeated his

conversation to *no one*." Lord St Kevan's voice was becoming almost fragile—hard and thin, with the stress of suppressed emotion—and seemingly brittle, as it came forth cooling from the furnace of his indignation. "I shall have to apologise to *that man* for the ungentlemanly, the dishonourable conduct of my own nephew." And then the clear thin voice trembled and suddenly broke, as he added, "It is the most humiliating moment of my life."

Claud felt both distressed and indignant; furious with Cade, and even a little angry with his uncle, for he knew that the report in the newspaper had not appeared, either directly or indirectly, through his words to Claudia. To Lord St Kevan, with his old traditions of statesmanship, and his exquisitely delicate sense of what was honourable in public life (probably a survival which had defied obliteration by the recent actions of his party), any private information from a member of a Government was the most sacred of communications. His professional sense of what was fitting was outraged; and he was overwhelmed with shame at having a nephew who could repeat to a lady a piece of confidential information, even though both he and she were innocent

of the newspaper article which had followed in this instance. He had known important secrets confided to ladies once or twice in his career before, and he had always found them followed by profound catastrophes.

Claud was the first to break the momentary silence. "I think you are not fair to me," he said. "I did not understand that the conversation was particularly confidential. I have only repeated it to one person—a lady—who assures me that she has not said a word about it to any one. This article has probably got into the paper through something Cade himself has said; and, instead of apologising for your nephew, I hope you will reply that you cannot permit him to be insulted."

Lord St Kevan could not help admiring Claud's spirit. He himself was as furious as Claud—perhaps, if possible, more furious—at the tone of Cade's letter. But this was the very reason why he was maddened by the knowledge that he could not give it an indignant and absolute denial.

"For the first time in my life I shall have to humiliate myself—to humiliate myself to that creature, to that impudent brazen cad;" and Lord St

Kevan began to lose control over himself—an occurrence so rare with this stately and courteous nobleman, that Claud might well be a little scared.

"Don't condescend to answer his letter at all," said Claud.

"I shall write, and I shall apologise. I shall apologise for my nephew's conduct in having foolishly repeated some portion of the conversation to a lady," said Lord St Kevan, with a certain air of almost dogged deliberation; for his strict sense of duty and of rectitude would not for a moment permit him to pass over these details in silence. "But I shall add," he went on, "that I have reason to believe that the report of the conversation went no further; that the paper obtained its details from other sources; and that, although my nephew may have deserted the principles of his family, Mr Cade is the last person who could convince me that he had also deserted its practices, even though he had joined a party which Mr Cade honours with so much abuse." He got up and again placed himself in the senatorial attitude before he went on—"As for your future, I shall of course continue the allowance I have always made you; what may happen at my

death remains to be seen—it will probably depend on your future conduct. But you must not look to me for encouragement, either pecuniary or otherwise. Speaking of your marriage, I think you are too young, and I think that a few more years' work, before you settle down, would be invaluable —invaluable to you. And therefore, as far as your future prospects are concerned, we may conclude that they mainly depend on yourself and your future exertions." He sat down; he had evidently finished. Claud murmured something which he believed sounded like some form of thanks, and in a moment found himself once more in the blinding sunshine and the busy street.

He felt crushed; he felt that he had been unfairly, unkindly treated. And yet he hardly knew why. His uncle had only proposed to tell the literal truth to Mr Cade, before defending his nephew from insults and insinuations. Lord St Kevan believed in his innocence, as far as the newspaper was concerned. It was only his own momentary indiscretion that was so cruelly magnified by his uncle's morbid sense of the honour of confidence. "Then again," he said to himself,

"how can I complain of my uncle's intentions about my future career? I have not chosen to walk in the path he had planned, and how can I expect him to smooth my way?" And Claud even added—for he was extremely sensible, and was almost capable of that rarest of tasks, the more or less impartial judgment of one's own actions and interests—that Lord St Kevan's views were on the whole very sensible. Why should he not work? why should his whole future depend on the will, it might be on the caprice, of another? But all this time a knell was ringing in his ears and tolling in his heart—a knell foretelling with a dread and iron certainty the death of all his hopes, the silent funeral of all his future happiness. "He has crushed me," cried poor Claud; "and now I know my love is impossible." And the knell seemed to take up the word "impossible," and jangle in with it "irrevocable" and "implacable," with a dreadful and continuous reiteration.

Lady Marlowe had planned a picnic for the afternoon of the day on which these events took place. Claud had been asked; but now he wondered with a dull indecision whether he should go or not. As

the time which had been fixed for starting approached, he had not troubled to make up his mind; and he would probably have remained behind, seated on a marble bench in the Forum, with an unread book before him, and his eyes unconscious of its proximity, had not the volatile Miss van Knut and her father happened to pass him on their way to the gate.

"Well, you do look glum," said that young lady. "You seem to have been badly left this time, anyhow. Aren't you coming around to this picnic?"

Claud shook his head.

"Oh, come on; it will smarten you up to skip round a bit."

"But you will have Darlington to skip round you," answered Claud, it must be admitted a little morosely.

"Hear him!" cried the young lady to her father; "hear him talk about the son of a great peer of the realm" (she rolled out the words with a tinge of comical gusto, as one might if one spoke about a mighty mandarin of the Celestial Empire) "as though he were a puppy dog!"

"My, Eliza, the way you talk! You are really

losing your high tone in Europe," remarked her father.

But Eliza, not in the least abashed, remarked, "Here comes his lordship," and made Darlington a curtsey, such as ladies give to a royal prince when he shakes hands with them, and which she pretended to think it was "the thing" to bestow on Darlington when he came forward to greet her.

"Really!" said Darlington.

"You needn't look so mad, Lord Darlington. I learnt it from the greatest authority on high life here, I assure you. Always curtsey so when honoured by being shaken hands with by a prince of the blood or a royal duke." And she imitated Mr Smythe's manner and mode of speaking (with just the slightest hint of his provincial accent) as she gave a second little illustrative curtsey.

"Mr Brownlow is moping here by himself. You must get him to come to the picnic, Lord Darlington."

"Oh, come along," said Darlington, taking Claud by the arm and preparing to pull him off the seat.

So Claud, seeing that resistance, if not useless,

would at any rate be more troublesome than acquiescence, got up from the seat and sauntered on beside Mr van Knut. Miss van Knut and Darlington seemingly considered that their duty was accomplished, and therefore indulged in the pleasure of walking on ahead together.

At the gate, they fell in with the rest of the party. They all started for the hills, with most of the ladies mounted on donkeys, and the men either walking beside them, or else plodding on in friendly couples.

The afternoon was lovely; the air was warm; the grey olives in the midst of the sunshine filled the view with their delicate silver glitter, and as the languid breeze passed over them they seemed to throw off a soft green shimmer of pearly light.

The party passed vineyards and dark-leaved orange-groves, delicate scanty grass—already a little browned by the sunshine—amid which the wild flowers glowed and sheltered. And ever behind and below them, as they scrambled up the little mountain-pathway, was the sapphire expanse of whispering waters, that now so serenely reflected the measureless blue of the sky above.

Lady Marlowe rode on with the Duchess of Man. Their conversation was fragmentary, and was mostly compressed into more or less exclamatory remarks on the beauty of the view, the heat of the weather, and the stumbles of their animals.

When the sophisticated reader has been informed that Mr Smythe was among the company, it is doubtless needless to tell him by whose side that gentleman was progressing.

He was now engaged in ingratiating himself with the Duchess, and in transforming the slightest of acquaintanceships into a reliable friendship. Although he was the "jack of all trades" of Society, and was accepted, nay, even encouraged by it, in that capacity, it still possessed individual members who looked upon him coldly, and considered him a stranger, or (to use his own word) an "outsider." The Duchess was one of these. She "did not know Mr Smythe." She assured all her friends that she did not intend to know Mr Smythe; and in spite of reciprocating his remarks with a certain (small) share of her own conversation, she would probably declare the very same thing to-morrow. For one

of the many advantages of being in Society is, that you can have pleasant and even intimate talks with a person, without being subsequently obliged to know him or recognise him in any way, if you fancy that you may be thought rather smarter for not doing so.

Then came Mr van Kaut, chattering cheerfully about "The Central of New Jersey Consolidated bonds" to a perspiring gentleman, who mopped his face and absorbed financial information with equal gusto.

Claud walked on by himself, and tried to turn over his future career in his mind. The sunshine and all the brightness around helped to focus it into a dark contracted vista of sunless chambers, mouldy books, and stifling courts, in which he played the supernumerary part of a briefless spectator: a helpless struggle through long years, eternally dragged on amid the fogs of gloomy London. This prospect, as he formed and pictured it in his mind, was not of the most cheerful character. But at the present moment, the prospect of meeting Mrs Denbigh was even more dispiriting. He hardly knew whether the absence of

Claudia from the party was a relief or an additional cause for depression. And so he walked on by himself mostly, with his head filled with gloomy forebodings, and only now and again exchanging a few words with any one near.

The party found their lunch prepared for them amid the shadows of some spreading trees — the servants had preceded them — and everything looked additionally tempting after the long scramble in the fresh air. The gentlemen divided their attention between indulging in the meal and assisting the servants to wait on the ladies. Jack de Barry was in "great form." He settled himself on one side of Miss van Knut (we can guess who was on the other), and was most assiduous in providing for all her wants.

"We want to make you feel at home," he said.

"Well, you are really both so attentive, that I can almost fancy you are Americans," she replied.

"Think of that now," said Jack. He was a little shocked; but not being very quick at repartee, he simply inquired if all the young men of New York did not have to send bouquets to all their young lady friends.

"Every toney young man who respects himself does so. At least he sends them to all the belles that are going to the same dance as he is. And then they take us the loveliest drives. In Europe the horses don't even seem to know how to trot."

"When I come over to the States, you'll take me out drives behind a trotter, won't you?" said Darlington.

"Unless you are very good, you won't have the privilege of being treated in the American way." Then she looked round. "Pa!" she cried out to her father, "here's Lord Darlington asking me to drive him about America behind a trotting horse."

Mr van Knut was quite undisturbed; he merely looked up—"You bet," he said, and went on with his lunch.

Some of the ladies also looked up; their eyes met—startled flashes of shocked intelligence passed from one to another. Mr van Knut did not see them, and would not have cared if he had. But his daughter intercepted and translated them with instinctive accuracy. She swept the whole company with one defiantly inclusive glance, as she said—

"In Europe, papa, you're suspected if you are too confiding or too polite. I see I must teach you how to behave in the European manner. You should have said, 'My dear, I will drive Lord Darlington round, if he is good enough to honour our cottage with his presence. You perhaps will be allowed to speak to him at the dinner-table, when your aunt is there as a chaperon.'"

Mr van Knut was somewhat puzzled by the tone of his daughter's words. However, he contented himself by saying, "Well, my dear, if Lord Darlington is good enough to come and stay with us, I guess he would rather that you drove him around and amused him than that I did," which did not exactly mend matters.

His daughter turned to Darlington with a shrug of her shoulders, "You see how impossible it is to educate one's parent up to European propriety. I cannot get him to understand that I have to be always guarded from you by a dragon in the form of a chaperon."

"I am sure I should like America awfully," said Darlington, simply.

Lady Marlowe was very much amused at this

bold defiance of all the conventionalities of Europe. "She really is a most extraordinary girl," she whispered to the Duchess. "And yet, you know, one cannot call her vulgar."

"But I can, and I do call her vulgar—indecently vulgar," said the Duchess, impressively.

"She is really the simplest and best-hearted girl in the world," said Lady Marlowe.

"Too simple to hide her scandalous fastness," said the Duchess.

"She is too simple to hide anything," said Lady Marlowe. "But I assure you she is anything but fast; indeed you would be surprised how prudish she is about many things."

"She is *not at all* a nice girl," said the Duchess, in her most oracular tones, which, combined with a superincumbent stratum of manner, simply finished any argument with a kind of blank cliff of assured conclusiveness.

Tottie, who in his small way sufficiently valued the friendship of duchesses, sat on her other side. He now saw an opportunity of engaging her in conversation, and began to fire off a succession of foolish phrases (which he managed to get accepted as jokes

by some people). He jerked them out with his head a little on one side and his arms crossed, each hand nursing the other's elbow—an attitude much affected by certain young men in London. They ran on somewhat like this: "The goose which this *pâté* is made from was fed entirely on tallow candles, I'm certain—not too much goose, but just enough tallow." ("Isn't he fun!" whispered Lady Marlowe to the Duchess.) "I'm goin' to a fancy ball at Nice next week. I shall go as a ballet-girl,—I think it will be so *chic*. I daresay I shall get lots of flowers and things given to me. I shall want a wig; I might borrow Lady Beechwood's. I could whisk it—woof!—off her head when she wasn't looking" (and he imitated the action while he spoke). "Then, when I came back, I could set up a scarecrow with it and one of Mrs Leo's gowns. They say she makes 'em herself. Just a piece of stuff sewn up like a sack; though I s'pose it doesn't matter, when all the figure she has is wrong side before. The other day she said to me, 'What do you think of Turner?' I said, 'Good gracious! what's that?' She said, 'Oh, he's a man —an English painter.' So I said, 'Oh, I thought it

was French for a dress-improver.' She said 'I really don't know what you mean.' So I said, 'Ask your grandmother.'—No, thank you; I daren't eat any more, or I shall bust one of my own stay-laces," said Tottie, refusing another helping of *pâté*, with a giggle as he spoke.

By this time the meal was over. Every one got up; the men had lit their cigars or cigarettes, and people began to stroll about. Some started on a further climb, to see the view from a height a little above the spot where they had been lunching; others went to pick wild flowers; others again preferred to stay and rest amid the cool shadows that slanted across the grass from the sheltering trees above.

M. Courier was one of the latter. His expansive bosom (or, to be strictly truthful, perhaps the word should be changed to figure) was embraced and confined by a black frock-coat. He was smoking a cigarette with all the national relish. He looked the picture of solid and satisfied comfort as he stood there with his face to the view and his back to the climbers. He seemed suffused with a warm geniality, all in accord with his general air of genial

warmth. No one could have guessed that he was an advanced Radical, dissatisfied with the state of society (not only Society with a big S, but the great society all around us that only claims a small one), and that even republican France looked on him, more or less, as a dangerous demagogue.

M. Courier, then, was warming himself in the sunshine, at the moment at peace with all men—for even the man who persuades himself most that he is a sacrificed martyr to civilisation, sometimes enjoys himself in this most tyrant-ridden of worlds—when he found himself touched on the shoulder by Claud. He received him effusively, for his French environment filtered his manner from everything short of extreme politeness. He expressed himself charmed to renew an acquaintance commenced so felicitously; and when Claud suggested that they should confirm its renewal with a gentle stroll, he again was charmed at the notion, and took Claud's arm with a certain impressive urbanity.

He plunged at once into the midst of his favourite topics. "Your statesmen," he said, "are wanting in ideas."

"Mr Buckle has ideas," said Claud.

"And therefore you mistrust him," said M. Courier.

"Yes; we think him a dangerous man," replied Claud. "The English people do not like being governed by a man who has ideas. They prefer to be governed by a man who has race-horses."

"Strange people, you English," said M. Courier. "And yet you flourish—or perhaps I should say, have done so, for I mistrust your future."

"There is danger ahead; for 'the ideas,' I am afraid, are gaining on 'the race-horses.'"

"Mr Cade assures me that, with the advent of democracy, an entirely new social system is being evolved."

"It is just about Mr Cade that I have been wanting to speak to you," said Claud, breaking somewhat roughly into the train of thought. "You remember the conversation the other day about Home Rule for India. It seems that Cade regarded it as more or less confidential; so that when an account of it appeared in a London paper he was furious, and accused me, in the strongest, and I must say the most unscrupulous terms, of having

betrayed him." Claud began to feel that perhaps there was a certain want of judiciousness in the way he was stating his case, considering that his great hope was that M. Courier would be able to acknowledge the indiscretion as his own. So he changed his tack. "My uncle, Lord St Kevan," he said, "was extremely annoyed about it; and as I am anxious to put myself right with him, I thought I might venture to ask you if you had any idea how—how the article came to be written?"

"My young friend," said M. Courier, expansively, "you will find that everything, *everything* appears in the papers nowadays. I know nothing about the article."

"But did you tell no one?" persisted Claud.

"I may have done so. I cannot remember."

"Perhaps some lady?" suggested Claud, remembering that in his own case it was assumed that to tell a lady such a piece of news was regarded as much the same thing as trumpeting it one's self to the general public.

"I think I did tell Mrs Denbigh—at the ball. Ah yes; I recollect," said M. Courier, in his easy comfortable way. Not in the least realising how

much he was adding to Claud's happiness, far less conceiving that he was helping to remove a stain from his honour, he went on with his cheerful talk. They chatted about Paris. M. Courier described the latest opera bouffe, and the new comedy at the Français. But to Claud, though he listened and answered occasionally, the whole stream of their talk seemed to flow on and over him like a stream of music. A weight had been lifted from off him; his whole nature had wildly rebounded, and had soared up to find in the surrounding sunshine the most perfect expression of its unspeakable relief. He had obtained at the same moment a shield to disarm attack, and a weapon for use if one should be necessary. He almost skipped along by the side of the portly Frenchman. He found himself singing a little French song, and when his companion said, "Please continue; that is one of the best of all Judic's *chansonnettes*," he permitted himself to sing it aloud, and even to mimic that clever lady with an imitation so lifelike and ludicrous that M. Courier burst out laughing.

"Ah! you have spirits," he said.

And Claud's spirits indeed seemed to flash and

dance with the dancing sunbeams. He felt them rising and bubbling over, in tune with the boiling kettle that purred a recall to the warm and refreshing tea it was promising. And they finally winged his feet into running races with some of the others over the flowery grass on their homeward scramble.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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OUR OWN POMPEII

OUR OWN POMPEII

A ROMANCE OF TO-MORROW

"Là du plaisant Avril la saisin immortelle
Sans eschange le suit,
La terre sans labeur, de sa grasse mamelle
Toute chose y produit,
D'enbas la troupe sainte autrefois amoureuse,
Nous honorant sur tous,
Viendra nous saluer, s'estimant bien-heureuse
De s'accointer de nous."

—PIERRE DE RONSARD.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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OUR OWN POMPEII.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS DENBIGH had watched the friendship (or "flirtation," as she preferred to call it) which was growing up between Miss van Knut and Darlington, at first with annoyance, and then with a well-founded dread. She had long expected, as we have before said, that in the course of time and of nature Darlington would become attached to her own daughter. They had known one another from childhood; they had always been fast friends. What could be more suitable, from all points of view,—from that of heaven where marriages are made, down to that of the 'Morning Post' in which they are recorded; what could be more for their

real welfare and happiness, than that this friendship should lose itself in a deeper and more passionate attachment? And now Mrs Denbigh felt that all might be changed by the intrusion of this extremely unpleasant and pushing American girl. Poor unsuspicious Darlington had been captured and carried off to the enemy's fortress. And while he was lying there bound and helpless, he might be forced to fatally commit himself—perhaps to allow himself to be carried off to America in triumph. Patriotic motives vied with maternal instincts (at least as far as it is possible that they could do so) in urging Mrs Denbigh to summon the victim's mother to the rescue. She had written a long letter to Lady Downstreamdown, impressing her with the urgency of the case. And that lady had replied that she was both pained and alarmed at the truly distressing news; and that in order to prevent such a degrading calamity, she herself would start for Pompeii at once. In the meantime, she was sure that she could rely on Mrs Denbigh acting a mother's part to her poor, deluded, defenceless boy. She had also probably written to Darlington, Mrs Denbigh thought; but if this was the case, it ap-

peared to make no difference in his conduct, and she saw that all her wits would be required to keep him from destruction until the Countess arrived.

Nor indeed was Darlington's conduct the only cause she had for anxiety. Troubles in this life never seem to come singly; and here was Claud complicating matters by wanting to marry Claudia. She considered the young man's prospects from all points of view, and from none of them did these prospects appear particularly satisfactory. He had only his uncle's allowance—an allowance depending on a goodwill which lately had been becoming somewhat scanty, she suspected. And even if this were continued, it would be of course of too slender a nature to support her daughter (in such a way as she had a right to expect) as well as her daughter's husband. Was Claudia at all in love with Claud? Mrs Denbigh kept asking herself. She thought not; and yet she was still extremely annoyed and uneasy about what she called "Claud's inexcusable conduct" on the night of the ball. If he had said nothing to her daughter, it might all have been so conveniently arranged — she meant, that Claud's

dismissal and the extinction of the affair might have been so conveniently arranged; while now, in the present state of things, if Claudia had any feeling in that direction,—if there were any gentle stirrings in her heart which might herald a dawn of love,—Mrs Denbigh was not sure that that heart was sufficiently disciplined, was sufficiently awake to repressions demanded by social position, to instantly cease at a word of command from tender reciprocation. In short, she doubted Claudia's docility. She knew that she chafed under the autocratic commands of social observance. She even had a horrid fear that if she were to tell her daughter that the man whom she loved had not a penny, it would not necessarily instantly extinguish that affection at once and for ever. A girl who was so strange as Claudia appeared to be—who preferred hunting to society, the country to the London season—might, if she fell in love, absolutely prefer that love to money. Such was the summary of Mrs Denbigh's constant thoughts. And this was her state of mind when she received a note from Lord St Kevan in response to one of her own. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR MADAM,—In reply to your letter, I need hardly assure you how pleased I should be if my nephew were able to form an alliance with the young lady you have indicated, or add my hopes that his future career, which is entirely in his own hands, will be a brilliant one.—I am, yours truly,

"ST KEVAN."

This brief, careful, and diplomatic note was not what Mrs Denbigh had "bargained for," as one may say. She felt that it was not sufficiently *intime*, not sufficiently confidential; and being instinctively enterprising, she sought and obtained an interview with Lord St Kevan.

He was extremely polished, extremely courteous, but also extremely reticent. She, however, gathered that at one time he had intended to leave a large part of his private fortune to Claud; that recent circumstances had shaken that resolution; and before she had finished her visit, she had even ascertained to a certain extent what these circumstances were.

The author fears that Mrs Denbigh has so far been represented in the odious light of a mercenary

and intriguing woman. And yet she was no worse than most careful mothers are, when the maternal instinct (that most transforming force of nature) has been excited. Does not the most ordinary of mothers acquire new powers, fresh perceptions, and strange intuitions, to assist her in making inquiries and obtaining the truth about the prospects, position, and income of aspirants for her daughter's hand? If she cannot go straight to the fountain-head, what subtle investigations she sets on foot—what an immense amount of tact, both acute and defensive, she generates in order to ascertain any and every thing that may assist her decision! And therefore, if justice is not done to Mrs Denbigh, we must remember that all that has been emphasised here is either ignored, unknown, or forgotten about other mothers, although it exists in various forms, and that it is chiefly the worst side of poor Mrs Denbigh's character which so far has presented itself in connection with this story.

"It cannot be," she said to herself with maternal decision; and we may be sure that this meant that it was not to be, as well.

There was a pretty street in Pompeii, lined on either side with small shops, mostly for *bonbons*, *bric-a-brac*, flowers, newspapers, books, and such other small articles as may be supposed to furnish the daily wants of a pleasure-seeking community. Bright awnings slid down from above them when the inroads of sunshine were too persistent; and the shadows thus cast helped to form a delightfully cool retreat for a morning stroll. Mrs Denbigh, the morning after the picnic, was enjoying the pleasures of shopping, and, allured by the tempting shade, she was lingering even a little longer than usual, when she found herself brought to a standstill by Claud, and then found herself granting an interview to him immediately.

Now that she was firmly determined that "no" was to be the word, she was anxious that it should be said as gently as possible. She suddenly felt a great kindness towards the young man. For, after all, was he not the nephew of a peer; an extremely charming young man in himself; and if he had only had the wherewithal, could any mother have desired a more presentable and satisfactory son-in-law? She thought she had been too hard on him in their

last interview. Now she would try and convince him—or what would be even better, show him how to convince himself—that his views were impossible; and then she would let him feel that although she shared in these views, yet she pitied him deeply, and sympathised with him in his great disappointment. So that it was in her kindest and sweetest manner that she assented to his request, and suggested that they should walk on the beach a little away from the noisy town.

He found her a comfortable seat, where some springing turf had asserted itself by the edge of the shore; and then, having thrown himself on the sand at her feet—an attitude chosen for comfort and not for supplication—he began, "You know what I want to say to you, Mrs Denbigh?" And she answered, with her eyes looking out to sea all the while, "Yes, I can guess."

"I have spoken to my uncle," he went on, "and he tells me that my future is in my own hands. I am sure, you know, he will use all his influence and do all that he can for me. And I shall work—oh, how I shall work, if I can feel that I am working for your daughter!" Claud's eyes lit up

and his voice trembled a little with enthusiasm as he spoke.

"Mr Brownlow," replied Mrs Denbigh—and her words came slowly, as though trimmed and measured for the effect to be produced—"I feel that the really kindest thing in the end will be to tell you the simple truth, even though it will give us both the pain of believing that this can never be." Her tones were sympathetic, but her words, in addition to blasting his hopes with a stunning blow, seemed to have a tinge, a ring of insincerity about them; and he cried out "Never be!" in a voice which expressed everything but convincement.

"Claudia is delicate," she went on, still marshalling the facts with a self-possession which bespoke preparation. "I am sure you are too generous to wish to provide her with a home where she would not get every comfort that she had been accustomed to."

"Of course," cried Claud, "she should—she shall—have everything that she can want." For love is blind to ways and means. It is nobly generous in its schemes for the happiness of the beloved one. Its plans for the future are all golden, lit up with

its own reflected lustre. "And I can work," he went on, earnestly—"every man should work; and with *her* promise to encourage me, the hardest work would be the greatest pleasure."

"I do not approve of long engagements: how long such a one as you propose would last, perhaps you are the best judge. But I should fancy that ten years would be the shortest time you could look forward to; and the Bar is such an uncertain profession that it might be fifty." Mrs Denbigh's voice was becoming a little colder. She wished to be kind—very kind—to Claud. But she had made up her mind that the marriage was to be impossible; and she began to think that he was very hard to convince—by kindness.

He got up and stood confronting her. He instinctively felt that a struggle was coming; but he was determined not to yield without doing all in his power to win over, convince, or conquer this resolute mother. "I fear that it would take some time before I should be able to offer your daughter such a home as she has the right to expect. But though I do not wish in any way to seem to depend on my uncle, yet you force me to tell you that I am cer-

tain he will make me an allowance such as would provide us with a home. At the present moment he is under a misapprehension about me; but when I have seen him, and have explained the mistake to him—as I am now in a position to do,"—he looked at her narrowly, but she did not seem to catch, or at any rate to apply his meaning,—"he will again adopt me as—you must excuse me, but rather than lose your daughter I must mention that I am sure he will again acknowledge me as his heir." Poor Claud stumbled and blushed. He felt humiliated in making a confession which, under any other circumstances, would have been in the worst possible taste. But he had been, as he considered, brutally driven into a corner; and he would use, if necessary, the sternest and most tasteless truths to extricate himself therefrom.

"I have seen Lord St Kevan," said Mrs Denbigh, quietly.

Then for the first time an angry flush lit up Claud's face, and he asked defiantly what Mrs Denbigh had learnt.

"Lord St Kevan gave me to understand that a secret—a State secret—had been betrayed."

"But not by me," cried Claud, with anger not flashing but swiftly concentrating in his face.

"No; but he told me that you had repeated the secret to a lady;" and then, with one glance, she added—"and that is often the same thing."

His anger flamed out in a thundering burst. It was a fatal mistake. "He did not tell you who the lady was. But will you say the same when *I* tell you that the lady was your own daughter?"

Mrs Denbigh also got up. They stood facing one another.

"And even if that is not proof enough," he went on, "I think I can convince you when I inform you that I have discovered who the real betrayer is"—she looked at him steadily, still unmoved—"if that information is not already superfluous."

"I do not understand you," she said, coldly. "You can inform your uncle who the real culprit is, and then he may forgive you."

"But you do not understand," burst in Claud, "that I want to shield the culprit. I do not wish, unless it is necessary, to mention the lady's name. It is you who are forcing me, by your refusal, to

take this step. You will not let me speak to your daughter unless a certain income is guaranteed, and this can be only assured by my explaining *everything* to my uncle; while if you would only consent to my suit, I am sure that all would come right in time."

Mrs Denbigh opened her parasol, as though it were a preparatory symptom of the termination of the interview. "I cannot allow this affair to go any further," she said, with a dignity which might have adorned a queen of tragedy, "unless everything has been explained to and arranged with Lord St Kevan. If you know the culprit's name, you had better utilise it in the explanation."

"Even if it is a lady's?"

"Certainly."

"And *you* give me this advice. Do you do so innocently, or do you do so knowing her name?"

"Mr Brownlow!" The tones of her voice had a warning ring, which seemed to say, "Beware! I can be very relentless when trifled with."

"I asked M. Courier if he had repeated the conversation in question to any one, and he replied that he had told one person—a lady."

Mrs Denbigh changed colour, as recollection, like an electric shock, flashed through her. She changed colour, but not with fear—rather it was with a feminine intensity of indignation (wholly illogical in its surmises and conclusions) at the insolence of daring to connect any such treachery with her. Passion lit in her eyes and flamed down over her burning cheeks. Her very skirts seemed to rustle and swell with outraged injury.

She walked away a step or two as though she would not condescend to speak again to Claud; and then apparently changing her mind, she stopped and turned her head sufficiently far for him to catch a glimpse of her profile.

"I do not know," she said, "whether you can judge how deeply you have insulted me. You have threatened to accuse me of betraying a secret in order to buy my daughter's hand with your silence." Then she blazed round full upon him—"But you have mistaken me. You can tell what you like—to whom you please—but you shall never be her husband," and she walked away.

Claud stood petrified. Then in a moment he recovered his senses sufficiently to say, "I will tell

no one. You are mistaken. I was not accusing; I was only explaining—defending myself." The last words were almost shouted after Mrs Denbigh, for her footsteps neither faltered nor halted as she steadily marched on.

When her retreating form had diminished sufficiently to force on Claud the realisation that he was really alone, he fell on the sand and tried to recall the words he had spoken—to review them in order to judge if the fault were his.

He told himself that Mrs Denbigh was entirely to blame. She had misunderstood him. She had forced him to speak out in order to defend himself and make good his own position. He had not accused her. He had only mentioned M. Courier's name, and she had blazed up in a moment. She must therefore, he said to himself, have been guilty. Yet her previous words seemed to imply an absolute ignorance as to what he was driving at—an absolute innocence when she understood his meaning. And so poor Claud tossed and turned on the sands, an outward demonstration of the tossings and turnings of his mind within.

The very day seemed to mock at him with its

brightness, shining as only a morning can shine when it is born from the marriage of Spring-time with the warm and endearing South. The breeze came softly over the sea, and just paused to ripple it into smiles as it passed on to woo the land. A happy sea-bird skimmed over the water, and vanished at times in rapid dives for food. A bare-legged, bare-armed young fisherman passed with a lounging grace which is given to many Italians—perhaps a heritage from ancestral Romans whose rich free-born blood may be even now beating along their veins. It all passed before Claud's eyes like a waking dream. He watched a little boat setting out from Pompeii—he even counted the strokes of the oar; but he did so mechanically, and his mind distracted itself from its thoughts by idly playing with each trivial passing event. For he knew that, whether his blundering or Mrs Denbigh's misinterpretation had produced their quarrel, it would be all the same to him. He would be punished. He would have to suffer.

At last he picked himself up, and walked slowly back, with a stern determination that not

a word of what had passed should escape his lips. In spite of appearances, he had acted so far, he believed, as a gentleman should, and for the future he would continue to do the same, come what might.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER Democracy every class interest, sooner or later, makes itself audible. If it is emphasised sufficiently to give trouble, it is inquired into. If it is still unsatisfied, and is still more tenaciously exacting, it is given in to, its demands (no matter what their nature) are legalised, and legislative enactments in its favour are passed until it is satisfied.

At this moment the criminal classes had become aware that their wants were neglected, their liberty curtailed (by acts of a more or less coercionary character), their interests unconsidered. And Radical experts having discovered this feeling to exist, proposed a plan to the Government which would tend not only to secure them justice and remove their disabilities, but also to secure their votes (which,

after all, was perhaps the most important consideration), and at the same time gratify the ruling Democracy.

This was the Judges Appointment Amendment Bill, by which all judges were to be elected every three years by universal suffrage, so that for the future the judges might not be placed in relations more or less uneasy with popular influences, and with what, in all probability, would be the dominating influence in the country. It was thought by the Democracy (and especially by the criminal classes) that the bench were not sufficiently "in touch" with public opinion; that the judges (relying on the irresponsibility of their position) adhered to an abstract form of justice which was too archaic, legal, and theoretical, and which therefore might, at any time, come into conflict with the boundless wishes and nobly impulsive action of members of the Democracy. It was felt (even by gentlemen in the position of Cabinet Ministers and newspaper editors—we presume, on behalf of their friends) that it would be extremely convenient if justice would make exceptions—would give an ear to the voice of the People when it proclaimed that a felony

was no felony, but the most righteous of mistakes—instead of, as at present, following the mere letter of the law, and taking no heed of the generous spirit in which it was broken.

In early communities the people interfered in affairs of justice as directly as in those of government. Towards the end of the Roman republic they forced justice to meet their wishes. "Let them do so again," said their modern leaders. They agreed (unconsciously, it is presumed) with Montesquieu when he said, "There is no liberty if the judicial power be not separated from the legislative and the executive;" and so they said, "Let us join them." When political economy came into conflict with the traitorous wishes of certain of the Queen's subjects, it was so much the worse for political economy. And just as the Ministry had forced on it the choice of either being banished to Saturn, or of adapting itself to their designs, so it was felt that the time had now arrived when the same choice should be offered to the "Fair Rosamond" form of justice. In short, the mob said, "We make the laws, and intend to superintend their execution."

But perhaps what convinced the Prime Minister

most that the bill was essential to the real happiness of the country, was (as experts informed him) that it would secure to himself not only the vote of the criminal classes themselves, but also the vote of all their friends, abettors, and sympathisers. Indeed he was further informed that if the bill were passed, this vote might be regarded as a steadily increasing quantity. Even a burglar's vote is not to be despised. The combined burglar vote would be an extremely valuable addition to any political party; and if it could only be properly organised, it might control the whole State. I was going to remind the reader that, from a voting point of view, a burglar is as important and desirable a man as a duke—when I remembered that he is really much more important and much more to be considered, because he has a vote while the duke has none.

Yet will it be believed that, in spite of all this, the bill was unpopular? Of course the Conservatives opposed it (for are they not capable of opposing *anything?*) Many of the Whigs even disliked it extremely. In vain they were told to follow their usual course of pocketing their dislikes in order

that their party should not be broken up. Most indeed wavered, but a few were resolute. Of course the ones in the House of Lords did not count, because they were told plainly that any opposition from them (as from the Lords in general) would be merely sounding a signal-call for the whole of their party to unite against them; that if they resisted, no Liberal would any longer doubt the expediency, nay, the absolute duty, of at once forcing the bill through their House; and that if they still resisted, the only result would be that they would have created a convenient pretext for the friends of good government and of freedom to abolish them altogether.

Lord St Kevan had already been several days in town. He hurried from one place to another. He was much at Brooks's. He met various other old and influential gentlemen. They shook their heads and spoke in whispers, which might be summarised by the oft-repeated phrase that "of course this will never do." They had secret conclaves at each other's houses. The reporters from the evening newspapers followed them about, and even interviewed their butlers. Should any surprise be felt at the

Cabinet's holding together, and its individual members agreeing to sink their scruples and fears in order to support the Prime Minister, it must be remembered that even if flagrant mismanagement had arrived at such a point that the Government were obviously ruining the country, there would still be found plenty of men (in both Houses) who would be but too ready to assist in the destruction, so long as they might be counted among the destroying leaders. For consider: on one side there is only your country's welfare; and on the other is the prestige, the honour, the income, the notoriety attached to such a position. There are elderly peers whose whole happiness in life is bound up in the one word *office*—not apparently mattering much under what or whom, so long as they can be in *the* Government. It is their one amusement, their great occupation. While in the House of Commons, it is thought by cynics that there may not be many who are swayed by any higher motives than those which will *pay* with their party and please their local caucus. But in politics it is, as we know, the unexpected which generally occurs. Now the Government had been

indulging in several little wars, or "military expeditions," as it preferred that they should be called; for it was by the extreme virtue of its members, and the extreme peaceableness of its principles, that it had been able to secure the entire vote of the "world"; and the dissenting world dislikes wars, though apparently it does not mind "military expeditions," when they are conducted by its own elect and particular ones.

It may indeed be contended that if these "military expeditions" had not been conducted by such a high-minded and peace-loving Government,—if, for instance, they had been proposed by a wicked, war-loving Tory Minister,—they would probably have been stigmatised as inhuman massacres of helpless and innocent natives rightly struggling for freedom and liberty—especially as the Government had continued to slaughter these natives by thousands for many weeks, with the only conceivable object of keeping itself in office. But though these equivocal military and parliamentary tactics might be called by several names, one stubborn and palpable fact remained which could not be lessened by sophistry or ignored by wilful

hypocrisy. And the fact was, that they had to be paid for.

The Government, which had always posed as the personification of prudent economy (it is a useful attitude for catching votes), now found itself bringing in one of the biggest Budgets on record. Some new taxes must be imposed; and it occurred to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that pipes might perhaps be taxed with advantage—not only the poor man's clay, but the rich man's meerschaum. The Chancellor thought so, but the House would not stand the idea for a moment. The country's interests did not matter—its honour might be tarnished, its name slighted, its prosperity ruined, its prestige destroyed, if only (our supposititious) Prime Minister willed it; but would the House stand its constituents' pipes being taxed to pay for this privilege? Never! The Government found itself defeated, and its astonished party found itself out of office, in spite even of the indignant protests which were almost screamed by the outraged and furiously incredulous Radicals. Then occurred a week of negotiations. A wild turmoil bubbled up of principles and in-

terests, of hopes and fears, of duties and desires. At least a dozen great houses were watched all day by numerous reporters. When any one entered or left any one of them, it was noted on the record; and if he were himself a leader of either party, he was duly followed and run to earth. One Cabinet Minister was pursued till he took refuge in the Hamam. Then his relentless persecutor felt that he had him safely bottled, and might wait till he was baking. So he gave him ten minutes to get himself stripped, before following on the trail. He caught his victim in the hottest room of all. There he submitted him to a fire of questions; and although the answers were not as adequate as might have been hoped for, they were capable of being enlarged and enriched sufficiently to warrant an extra special edition of the paper that evening. Lord St Kevan had interviews with the leaders of both parties. Now was the time, he felt, for his scheme of a Coalition Government to become a reality. Now was the time for all the friends of order and good government to rally round the banner of some great (Whig) peer. The coalition, of course, must be under the ægis of the Whigs,

and thus neutralise all the dangers and the subversive views of the Radical tail.

But, alas! Lord St Kevan forgot that we are now living in the days of Democracy, when party is put before patriotism, and politics have become a gigantic scramble for place, for power, and for the spoils of the conquest. That any of the "loot," as a prominent Radical called it, should go to the Tories, filled the enlightened and advanced Liberals with fury. Lord St Kevan was listened to, but he thought that the listeners were a little impatient; and for the first time in his life he felt himself almost snubbed by the leaders of his party. He shut himself up in his study. He wrote two long brilliant and convincingly statesmanlike letters to the 'Times.' They were honoured on two consecutive days with "leading" big type and two whole columns of the inside page of that majestic organ. And that was all. They might be—indeed they were—convincing; but they were not convenient, and so everything went on as before.

The Conservative leaders decided that, under the circumstances, they could not carry on the Govern-

ment; and a week after their defeat the Liberals were found to be back again in office, with a more Radical Cabinet than ever. Two or three of the junior members of the Government were supposed to have hired their uniforms at a theatrical *costumier's;* at least it was known that these people (extremely respectable and worthy in their own walk of life), who had had neither time nor money to spend on the cultivation of their own aspirates, could not have any to spare on the acquisition of such superfluities as these.

The old gentlemen at Brooks's, and even a large contingent of the more advanced Reform, looked down the list of Ministers, especially at the minor appointments, with a kind of scared horror. "Who are these men?" they asked one another. "Where do they come from; and what, in heaven's name, are they doing here?" One or two of them, it is true, had been vaguely heard of before, but only as obscure agitators or meddlesome provincial town-councillors. It was known they had somehow got into Parliament: "any one," the old gentlemen said, shaking their heads, "can get into Parliament nowadays. But how had they got into the Govern-

ment? The whole thing's quite impossible. Why, we don't even know them by sight." There they were, however, flaunting themselves, cuckoo-like, in the sacred nest. If this were not stopped, the analogy might go even further. The affair was too serious to be overlooked, and strong remonstrances must be made in the right quarter. It was as though these worthy gentlemen had gone home and found two or three of their own gardeners comfortably seated at the dinner-table. They were as outrageously shocked and scandalised as they would have been had they found the very Ministers in question seated there, looking quite at home, and enjoying themselves in the participation of the meal.

The excitement of the crisis spread even to the happy idlers by the tideless sea. Mr Giles, on the arrival of the first telegram, was up and off to England. And if the truth must be told, he was not sorry to leave Pompeii. It had never been quite congenial to his material spirit. He had gone there originally to stay with a north-country gentleman, who was very rich, and very anxious to represent some free and independent electors in Parliament. Mr Grimstone — for this was the

gentleman's name — had invited Giles out there, in order to talk the matter over. In exchange for a liberal subscription to "the cause," Giles had placed at his disposal one of the safest suburbs of a great north-country town. And Mr Grimstone, in his gratitude, had added to his subscription a promise that he would have no will or opinions of his own, but would vote entirely as Mr Giles (the mouthpiece of the Centralised Executive Committee of the Caucus) should command.

In this ingenious manner it is obvious all real representation can be entirely evaded, and a Prime Minister (if assisted by the machinery of his party) can make himself absolutely autocratic. And an absolutely autocratic Prime Minister was exactly what Giles and Cade (who looked upon himself as a certainty for the next vacant Premiership) were actively engaged in creating.

Pompeii, on its part, had regarded Giles with unconcealed dislike. Not only his principles but his personality was distasteful to it. He was extremely ill-bred and extremely rude. It was very difficult to keep remarks down to even a decent inaudibility when he sat in the reading-room,

serenely grooming and curtailing his nails with his penknife. One or two people, it is true, had had the temerity to try to snub him, but they might as well have tried to snub a crocodile. Either he did not perceive the intention, or if it were very obvious, he simply revenged himself by insulting them. And when one mild old gentleman gently remonstrated with him about something that his party had done, he retorted, "That's one of your Tory lies," and turned his back on his astonished companion.

He had practised in his younger days at the Old Bailey, taking up the defence of shady cases, and making himself notorious by the brow-beating he used to give to timid witnesses, especially if they were ladies. In a word, he was a thick-skinned bully. You knew it the first moment you looked at him and noticed his low-bred, ill-tempered face, with its brazen expression, on which the real nature of the man was stamped, and which must have been slowly moulded on the stony heart behind it. You knew it from his walk, from the overbearing tones of his voice, from the insufferable presumption of his manner.

The days when he had lived on the proceeds of handbooks, and precarious half-crowns acquired in the shady ways where such small coins lurk, had of course long ago passed away. He was now extremely prosperous. He had blossomed forth in an invulnerably gaudy and tawdry array of the most offensive and defensive natural brass.

He was so assertively resonant and metallic, that one would have expected him to have had the effect of a peripatetic lighthouse, as it were, warning every one off from any near contact with his ideas or person. That he did not entirely do this, but on the contrary was very successful in his own way, is only another proof of how leading a motive interest must be in that complex collection of motives called "human nature."

Our gay and unscrupulous Flashington—clever but conscienceless—was flying about the country and speaking at meetings which were being organised in order to force the party into surrendering to the Prime Minister's schemes. He had been taken up warmly by the National Liberal Club, and his speeches showed such promise (being successfully—well, let us say non-principled) that his

party soon realised what a prize it had won in himself.

And while all these adverse and noxious passions were sufficiently hot and fuming to transform themselves into that pure crystal of party, which, when solidly formed with perfect cohesion, so strangely refracts both the national interest and honour, let us return to Pompeii and see what is going on in that lovely spot.

The great event there had been the arrival of Mr Gradley. He was a power in the State—or at least in his own estimation. He had no politics, but he believed himself to be the confidential friend of the leading Ministers of both parties, and to have a large share of that mysterious force which is said to balance the English Constitution. His claim to exoteric fame rested on the fact that he edited a monthly magazine called the 'Latter-Day Review,' not only with the utmost enterprise but with the utmost success. Any one who was in any way illustrious or notorious was asked to contribute an article, and the consequence was a combination of styles, sentiments, expressions, and names that was blinding in its incongruity. Pom-

peii had indeed proved a happy hunting-ground. Smythe had written an article on "The Future of Society," which was eagerly sent for by the great socialistic philosopher (who had never heard of Smythe) when it appeared in the Review, and was consigned to the wastepaper-basket with surprising rapidity after its arrival.

Mrs Leo had promised a symposium on the affections, which was to be called "A Phædrus of the *Cinque Cento*." Mr van Knut was writing on "The Future of American Railway Debenture Bonds"; and as the Review "palpitated with actuality," even Prince Chioggia had been asked to contribute an article on "The Italian Equivalent for Three Acres and a Cow," and M. Courier to give "A Frenchman's Ideas on the Three Estates of the Realm." It will be seen that the title of the article and the name of the author were everything; for it is extremely probable that not only are M. Courier's ideas on the "three Estates" vague and picturesquely misty rather than luminously enlightening, but that he has not even the faintest idea of what "the three Estates of the realm" really consist.

Mr Gradley found out Claud, and wanted him to write on "Tory Democracy," as a young man. Claud told him that he was not a Tory democrat, and did not know much about their principles.

"Well, well," rejoined Mr Gradley, still persevering. "I want, don't you know, an article by a young man who is enthusiastic for his cause. Something eloquent and militant, which regards Toryism as a living and conquering force. Suppose we call it 'The New Toryism, by Young England.' Yes"—he put his head thoughtfully on one side—"yes, that wouldn't sound bad. You would begin by invoking the shades of Pitt and Canning, and then you would come on to the imperial mantle of Lord Beaconsfield—and so on, and so on. I see the makings of a very pretty article. I can spare you seven pages—about 450 words a page, you know—and I must have it ready by the 15th of next month."

Even after receiving these detailed particulars, Claud declined. He assured him that as far as he could judge and had made up his mind, he believed in the old Toryism, the old Liberalism; and that

he mistrusted the new Toryism almost as much as he loathed the new Radicalism.

"But surely that need not prevent you writing the article," said Gradley, with bland incredulity.

"Oh," said Claud, not to be outdone in cynicism, "get Flashington to write it for you. He's the very man to do that sort of thing. And as the article is signed 'Young England' and his name won't appear, I am sure he will be only too delighted. He will pocket the guineas, and no one will be any the wiser."

Six weeks afterwards every one was talking about the invigorating article on "Triumphant Toryism," and none knew that its existence was due to Claud's suggestion and Flashington's resourceful cleverness.

CHAPTER XIV.

One fine cool morning the band were playing about eleven o'clock, and had surrounded themselves with groups of people who regarded the sound of music as a signal for assembly, and who therefore now hastened to put in an appearance, either to chat or to listen. The particular morning of which we are writing was even more seductive than usual. There was a gentle breeze, which carried aloft on its shoulders little white wool-like clouds. They were too isolated and insignificant, both too young and too innocent, to hint at rain. They merely made their presence felt by coquettishly slipping in front of the sun at intervals for a few moments. When they had passed gently on, a fresh flood of sunbeams came down on the Forum, and lit up the whole scene with redoubled

splendour. There were the brilliant dresses of the ladies,—the expansive parasols throwing becoming shadows over the delicate faces they guarded so assiduously. The men strolling or lounging about in different costumes, which were picturesque in the varying compromise that convention had made with comfort. A couple of Italian officers, with sparkling epaulets, the tightest of light-grey trousers, and clanging swords, marched up and down—their manner just touched with that harmless and gallant swagger which is characteristic of the military members of their charming nation, but is so entirely free from any conceit or self-consciousness, that one more than forgives its manifestation. There were children playing, and now and then breaking into the music with happy shouts. An even greater air of vivacity than usual pervaded everything. And Miss van Knut, as if to do honour to the occasion, was, if possible, more delightfully dressed than ever.

She looked more than ever like a sketch by a modern French artist. Round her neck was a broad muslin scarf, which broke into an enormous

bow beneath her chin. Her face was shaded by a magnificent parasol — a glorious prize blossom of its race — and further protected from the glare by a thin crimson veil. Her lips, when she smiled, parted until they gave a delicate glimpse of both their rows of little white teeth; and she was smiling now. Jack de Barry was talking to her. He was trying to describe to her the mosaic-like composition of London Society.

"But don't you ever know any one who is not in Society?" she asked him.

"One has to know a few 'outsiders,'" he told her. "But the worst of it is, that one never knows what to talk to them about."

"Surely you must have some topics in common. If there's nothing else, I suppose you are both subject to the same weather."

"The weather, the theatres, and the Academy—the three great inevitables from which there is no escape. Yes, every one has something to say about them. But I'll tell you the kind of thing that puzzles a fellow. The other day I went to a sort of middle-class dance at

Prince's Hall. I was given my ticket of course —it was in aid of a hospital or something. Well, when I got there, there were the most extraordinary couples you ever saw, reversing all over the floor. A red-haired 'outsider' came up to me and asked me if I would dance. I said 'Yes,'—I'm so fatally good-natured, you know. He introduced me to a girl, and she said, 'I don't like this floor as much as the town hall's.' I didn't know what she was talking about. The next girl said, 'Do you often go to the town hall?' They all talked about the town hall. And would you believe it, I found out next day they were talking about some town hall in West Kensington, where those sort of people go to dance and amuse themselves."

"That shows how the greatest minds may sometimes acquire information from even the lowest of mortals," responded Miss van Knut. "I must remember not to go there when I come to town. Or perhaps," she went on, changing her tone, "as I am not in Society I shall be expected to frequent that sort of place."

"But you are—or you will be in Society when

you come to town. And that reminds me, you must come and have supper with me at 'The Wellington.'"

"And then I suppose I shall be in Society. I think going to Court will be perfectly lovely."

"You'll find it a beastly squash. And ladies' elbows, I'm told, become very sharp, when they're used as a means of progression."

The band were in the midst of the overture to "La Gazza Ladra," which seems to effervesce and bubble over with buoyant youth, and every sort of uncontrollable joy and happiness. The conversation dropped for a moment, and then the music itself suggested a new topic.

"What's come to Italian opera in England?" asked Miss van Knut, leaning back and just crossing her feet, as though she must select the most comfortable of her attitudes before she gave up any more of her mind to conversation.

This was a congenial subject to De Barry. He had strong views on the decadence of opera, and he explained to her that, in a way, its manager had killed the goose with the golden eggs, by encouraging and acquiescing in two prevalent but

fatal ideas, instead of trying to counteract them, and prove them to be false. One was that only Madame Patti paid, and everything therefore must be sacrificed to Madame Patti. The other one was, that it didn't much matter how an opera was performed, as the audience only came to look at one another. At last people found out that they could see their friends elsewhere without paying a guinea and upwards; and so it came to this, that whenever you asked any one if he often went to the opera, he replied, "No, I never go now, for there's nothing worth hearing except Patti; and I've heard her so often, you know." "Then there's the newspapers," he went on; "they are always proposing that we should have better opera at cheaper prices — which, I think, is unreasonable. I say, better operas and more enterprise. Why don't they give us 'Masaniello' with a thoroughly good dancer, for instance, at the same prices? For the London public don't mind paying a great deal for a thing if it is very good; but it must be the *best of its kind*, or they won't pay anything. And that is why Italian opera at cheap prices will never pay in England."

"Anything more?" said Miss van Knut, amused at his earnestness.

"Yes; plenty more. Let the manager treat opera as a serious performance, and not as a frivolous amusement. Let it begin at eight, with never more than ten minutes between the acts—in Vienna they only have about six. Let them bring a thoroughly good ballet-troop from Italy, with a couple of really dramatic ballets, which might be given when light opera is played. Let them revive old operas which every one wants to hear, instead of producing new ones so heavy that they turn the house into a wilderness. And lastly, let them find a tenor who can act as well as sing, and who, if he is not handsome, at any rate looks like a gentleman. When Faust is changed into a young man, doesn't your heart always beat with alarm at what you are going to see; and then sink when a new variation of a stout and elderly gentleman, in purple cotton velvet, and fat little legs in tights, appears as the result of the best transformation that Mephistopheles can apparently effect? I consider that turning poor old Faust into such a scare-

crow of a young man as one generally sees, is cheating him out of his bargain."

"Yes, even the devil should draw the line somewhere." Then she looked round, and her eyes rested a moment on Redburn, who was talking to some ladies opposite. "You don't make enough of your greatest men," she said.

"Not make fuss enough about them! I'm sure we do. One can't escape from them."

"I mean your authors and artists and musicians, and so on."

"Oh, these sort of people," said De Barry, in a voice which showed that he had never before heard the adjective applied as it was in this instance. "I'm sure we read their books and look at their pictures enough. I don't see that we are called upon to know them."

"It would do you good if you did. Why, in New York we think no end of them."

"Well, you must admit that they're generally disappointing when one meets them. Besides, there are a lot of people now who do ask them to 'at homes'; and there are one or two of them in Society, as well."

"Mr Redburn, for instance?"

"Yes, he is in the smart set. But then he's a privileged person, you know."

"And how does one become a privileged person?"

"That is a mystery which many people are trying to discover, but which no one has fathomed yet. Either you are privileged or you aren't. I suppose it depends on the Goddess of Fashion. You might fancy, for instance, that I'm privileged; but I'm not."

"Is Mr Tottie Fobbes privileged?" asked Miss van Knut, as her eyes lit on that flaccid young gentleman fanning himself with a lady's fan which he had borrowed.

"No. He thinks he is, but he isn't. That's where he makes a mistake, and that's why he was pilled at 'The Wellington.'"

Miss van Knut got up. "I intend to be a privileged young lady myself when I come to town. You can mention it to the right people—the Goddess of Fashion, or whoever is necessary," she said, as she prepared to walk away.

But before she did so De Barry had time to

exclaim, "We are the privileged people, for ours is the privilege of having the pleasure of your acquaintance."

Mrs Leo was firmly planted on a chair a little to the left; and Mawnan had taken possession of the one next to hers. He found, when he had sat down, that Miss Rattletubs was on his right; and so he audibly congratulated himself on being about to participate in a "feast of reason and a flow of soul."

"They say that they are going to put a heavy tax on yachts," said Miss Rattletubs, by way of beginning the flow of soul.

"Dear me! which of your friends is going to do that?"

"I don't know — I heard it. They think that they minister to luxury and ease. There isn't room in the world for yachts nowadays."

"I should have thought that the fuller the world got, the more people would be wanting one to make one's self scarce in a yacht," said Mawnan, pleasantly.

"Miss Rattletubs means that the world will soon be so busy and crowded and poor, that it

will put a stop to all such idle and expensive pastimes," remarked Mrs Leo serenely, contributing her share to the feast of reason.

"Yes, all sport is doomed, they tell me," continued Miss Rattletubs; "and I must say I'm glad of it. It's so horribly cruel. You know, I was one of the originators of the 'Society for the Suppression of Sport.'"

"Well, I really believe with this new Government that *anything* may happen. I hear that some of the under-secretaries are a rum lot."

"They are the real earnest workers,—none of your aristocratic place-hunters. Now we shall see what *real* progress means." Mrs Leo turned round to supply more facts towards reinforcing the statement. "My husband," she said, "thinks the day is not far distant when all the members of the Government will be taken from the middle and lower classes. And then, he says, we shall see the beginning of a new era. Every one will be prosperous and happy. No one will be poor, and no one, Lord Mawnan, will be rich. We shall be pioneers of progress. And we shall be so respected abroad, that we shall be able to

abolish the army and navy, and set the example of a universal peace."

Lord Mawnan, though he was extremely easy-going as a general rule, sometimes roused himself, and he did so now. He nearly said, "I always told you you'd marry a fool." And he did permit himself the pleasure of murmuring "Bosh."

"You may say 'bosh,' Lord Mawnan," put in Miss Rattletubs, in order to prevent the conversation from being brought to a premature stop by such an interjectionary obstacle. "But as some one said,—I really forget who it is at the moment—it may have been that dreadful Lord Beaconsfield—or was it dear John Bright?—I don't know,—well, as some one said, 'There is no repartee so crushing as a large majority, and we have the large majority now.'"

"I should have thought you had got far beyond John Bright by this time," said Mawnan, a little irrelevantly.

"Yes, so we have," he was answered. "But still he did his best, though I am sorry to say that he was never quite sound on the great female question."

"And when you have solved the great female question, and have made the race of women quite universal, what shall you do for husbands?" asked Mawnan.

"We shall do very well without them, Lord Mawnan," said Miss Rattletubs, severely.

"Well, 'pon my word! what'll become of the race then?"

"Lord Mawnan is only sneering at our endeavours, which he is probably unable either to understand or to appreciate," put in Mrs Leo, in explanation.

"I don't at present, but I'm trying to learn. Now tell me about the Church: are you going in for disestablishing that?"

"Of course," said Mrs Leo. "In these days of enlightenment, can anything be more degrading than a National Church?"

"Well, I'm a Churchwoman myself," Miss Rattletubs hastened to announce, as she did not approve of the Church's disestablishment being regarded as a means for weakening religion; "but I'm a member of the Church Liberation Society. They say that when once it has been relieved from

the degrading trammels of the State, it will rise up all the stronger."

"Also, I suppose, relieved from its own endowments?"

"Certainly; we need them for the higher secular education," said Mrs Leo.

"Well," said Miss Rattletubs briskly, having no idea of allowing Mrs Leo to wholly appropriate and distribute the endowments in question, "when these cramping shackles have been struck from the paralysed limbs of the Church, she will probably be able to support herself; and her endowments will revert to the channels originally intended by the donors. They will be used for various religious and philanthropic objects."

"And the cathedrals will be used as music-halls, I presume," said Mawnan.

"No, as museums," said Mrs Leo, solemnly.

"As halls for discussions and meetings, as philanthropic centres, and as places where ministers of all denominations can preach," said Miss Rattletubs, solemnly.

"Even now you don't seem quite agreed as to what to do with the plunder," said Mawnan, rising.

"I am going off in my yacht in a day or two. I shall count upon you to let me know when your millennium is about to begin."

"In order to return?" asked Mrs Leo.

"No, in order to sail away as far and as fast as possible."

"And then?"

"Then I shall probably turn pirate." And he strolled away.

The music or the fine weather, or both, had brought out the beautiful Miss White into the sunshine, and she had placed herself on a chair facing the band. She was considered the belle of Pompeii. She was as tall and as ideally lovely as a statue. She was serene and calm, and always very still. She held that her contribution to Society was given when she permitted it to look upon her; and that, although it ought to try to make itself agreeable by talking to her, it had no claims on her conversation in return.

By her side sat a charming young Guardsman called Bertie Portland. He was always called "Prince Prettyboy"—or "Prettyboy"—in the regiment, because he had once played that part in a

regimental burlesque. He had a sweetly languid and effeminate manner, which, when you knew him, contrasted strangely with his real nature, which was brave, enterprising, energetic, and manly; and he was reported to have done wonders when he was out in the Soudan with the Camel Corps, although he had still retained his manner through every difficulty.

"Tell me all about the Soudan," said Miss White. And a question like this was a sign of unusual interest on her part.

"The whole thing was an awful bore." His lifted wrist showed the sparkle of a bangle beneath his shirt-cuff. "We hadn't even any soap. It's awfully boring when you have no soap."

"Did you get much fun?" asked Miss White, adopting the typical young lady's question, when their curiosity is still in the realm of generalities.

"No. The only fun I got was when I was in hospital. I had a fever or something, and used to fancy I was bear-fighting and making hay in England."

"In the fields?"

"No, in some other chappie's rooms."

"But didn't you save some one's life—weren't you mentioned in despatches?"

"I don't know. I know I made plenty of people save mine. As for despatches, they just shove your name in to fill up—same way as straw is shoved into packing-cases."

"And what do you think of this place?" asked Miss White, with a sense that there was not much amusement to be extracted out of the Soudan through the medium of her present companion.

"Well, I think it is nearly as boring as the Soudan. There's nothing for a chap to do here. I shall go back to town in a day or two."

Then Redburn came up, and they began to talk about some new arrangements which were contemplated at Hurlingham. Portland almost became loquacious when the topic was as important as the question of how often the polo-ground should be watered, and had ceased to deal with his own uninteresting actions.

Miss White looked round, for she was not accustomed to be neglected. Her eyes fell on Mr Smythe, and he hastened to her side. She was one of the finest beauties he had created, and he was

very proud of the performance. He had unearthed her at a suburban dance at the Star and Garter where he had been induced to go by a friend. He had at once marked her down, and had subsequently brought her out at one of the best houses. She had been a great success. Many of "the best people" had taken her up. She and her mother (the widow of a wholesale jeweller) had been borne in triumph by a wave of fashion from the comparative obscurity of Surbiton, and now, resting quiescently upon the shore, she began to sparkle in the dazzling sunshine of Society.

The mother, although not exactly "impossible," was—let us say—"unusual"; and Mr Smythe deemed it wise to keep her as much as possible in the background, where the shadow of her daughter's charms might not add its enhancing gloom to the original shadiness of her appearance.

Arrangements were therefore made with a certain impecunious baronet's wife (who shall be nameless here, for we will respect the confidential nature of the transaction) to introduce her at Court, and to do the necessary chaperoning. When Pompeii was opened, Miss White was elected a

member, but her chaperon was blackballed; she had therefore been forced to have recourse to her mother's protection, and she had brought her mother out here as her guest. Yet Miss White was neither a heartless daughter nor a scheming girl. She (and indeed her mother also) simply accepted the position, with all the conditions proposed by the world, and quietly admitted the consequences which must follow. One of these was that she should be separated from her mother; and so they separated, at the call of duty, in the most natural way in the world, without either uttering a complaint or even a murmur. She was a great beauty. She was received and accepted as such. And everything must inevitably be sacrificed to this situation.

Mr Smythe was now in one of the most ingratiating of his moods. He criticised, he advised, he complimented. Would not Miss White like, he asked, to be introduced to the Imperial Court at Vienna? If only she could arrange to meet Lady B—— at Milan, they could go on there together; and every one, he assured her, would be at her feet.

And the young lady, who only a year before

could hardly sleep with excitement before a dance at Richmond, now turned her head languidly away, and answered, "No, thank you; it's too fatiguing."

At this moment Darlington and Claud chanced to stroll in from the street leading to the north gate. They had just been for a long scramble up among the vines and olives, over those pebbly paths which wind on for ever between low stone walls, and constantly defer the hope that they will somewhere gently sink into grassy ways, where the footfall will be soundless on the springing turf. They had had many walks together lately. Darlington had found that Miss van Knut's discretion had, for the moment, dominated over her valour, and that their mock courtship was becoming more of a mockery than ever. He had therefore been all the readier to accompany Claud whenever he had proposed a walk. Claud, on his part, was filled with an almost sullen indignation against Fate.

He felt that not only had he not done any wrong, but that he had hardly committed an indiscretion; and now everything seemed to combine to punish him. He had even pledged his word to Mrs Den-

bigh not to repeat their interview, and therefore he had not the satisfaction of pouring his troubles into the sympathising ear of his companion. He had told him, indeed, that it was hopeless; and Darlington, with his boyish confidence and optimism, had assured him that he would speak to Mrs Denbigh and make it all right. But when he had begun in his delightfully naïve and blundering fashion to develop his views to her on the delicate subject, he had received such a rebuff as he had certainly never received from her before, and probably never from any one else in his life either. He in his turn came to Claud for sympathy, and they decided that either Mr Smythe or Miss Rattletubs, who were the two people in Pompeii they disliked most, must have bewitched her.

"I told her, you know, plainly that my interference was entirely disinterested," said Darlington—"because I wanted her to understand that she had no chance of catching me. Well, what do you think she said? She said, 'Lord Darlington, you don't know what you're talking about.'"

Claud thanked him for his kind efforts, but asked

him not to make any more in future, as he was sure they were quite useless, and might become worse than useless.

On this particular morning they had not talked about cruel fortune or blighted affection, but, filled with the lightheartedness and hopeful good-humour which are given by youth and healthful exercise, they had scrambled up the hillsides until they found a convenient place for cigars to be lighted and legs to be rested.

Far below them Pompeii was spread out like a little miniature town of cardboard. It looked almost near enough and small enough to be crushed with a stone flung by a careless hand. Two or three yachts were resting at anchor in the little bay. The two friends lazily watched the scene for some time in silence. And then Darlington threw himself on his back, tipped his hat over his laughing eyes, and, still contemplating the scene from between his legs, said—

"Isn't it rum how near it looks?"

"It's the clearness of the air, I suppose," said Claud.

"I wonder where she is now," said Darlington,

after a pause, only broken by a few philosophical puffs of smoke.

"Who?"

"The Mater."

"Why, isn't she in England?"

"No; she is in the train somewhere. She has written to me to say that she has sacrificed everything in order to hasten to rescue me from the toils of the American adventuress." He still smoked coolly on, and he obviously looked forward to the coming interview with perfect calmness, although whether he felt certain of being victor or vanquished was not apparent. "I believe," he went on, "that brute of a Mrs Denbigh wrote and put her back up, out of revenge for my taking your side and fighting your battle."

"I am awfully sorry," said Claud, "if you get into a row about my affairs."

"It would have to come out some day," Darlington replied; and then, in answer to a question of Claud's, he assured him that he was not really engaged, but soon hoped and intended to be. "They'll kick up an awful row at home," he said, with such perfect equanimity that it would

have sounded ludicrous to any one who did not know that everything that his parents' darling did, although it might appear reprovable at the moment, was always finally found to be quite right. "I believe they consider I'm booked to one of the Doncaster girls. How those dear girls will open their eyes when they read of my engagement in the 'Morning Post'!"

"But you're not engaged yet," suggested Claud.

"No; but I soon shall be. I'm going to take time by the forelock and propose before the Mater arrives."

"You'd really better wait, Darlington, till your mother comes," said Claud, in an earnest voice, and with sufficient anxiety about Darlington's resolve to make him sit up by way of emphasising his words. It was useless.

"I think I'll go and get engaged before lunch," said Darlington, in a tone which showed that he regarded "getting engaged" as much the same sort of simple action as having one's hair cut, for instance.

"You don't know yet that she'll have you," said Claud, laughing.

But even this gloomy reflection did not ruffle Darlington's composure. "Oh yes," he said, shying a stone into a neighbouring vineyard, which was apparently aimed at Pompeii itself; "she'll have me. Come along." And the two young men retraced their steps and found themselves in the Forum, as we have before seen.

Darlington, with that perfectly natural coolness and assurance which is one of the attributes of an aristocratic race, strolled up to Miss van Knut.

"I say," he began, "will you come and eat oranges in the orange-orchard?"

Miss van Knut thought that it was too near lunch-time.

"Oh, come along," he said, with almost brotherly bluntness.

"I suppose I must yield," she answered, rising slowly. And as she did so she added that she was sure her father would like to come and suck oranges too.

Darlington unceremoniously brushed aside her intention of looking for her father by telling her that there was no time to find him now.

As they pushed their way over the stones in

the path leading to the orange-grove, their talk came fitfully, and confined its attention to passing trifles.

"We mayn't have many walks more," said Darlington, in a voice which was intended to be pathetic. "I may be summoned home to my constituency."

"Can't they tune up without you?"

"Well, if there was a dissolution, I suppose I ought to show up. There are such a rum lot in the Government now that my father says they can't stay in long."

"Isn't your father in the Government?"

"Well; he's in the Household. But I meant the Secretaries of State and those sort of people. I hope he'll get the Buckhounds in the next respectable Liberal Government."

"The Buckhounds! My, how majestic! How reverent I shall feel if he does. What are his duties? Has he to feed them himself?"

"He hunts 'em, and sends out the invitations for the enclosure at Ascot. That's what my mother wants. She wants to get at the list and overhaul it." Then Darlington changed his tone, for he sud-

denly remembered that he had led up to what he was going to say. So in a tone of almost comic gravity he began, "My mother is coming here soon."

They had reached the oranges. They were already seated on the grass with an orange apiece when this announcement was made. It did not seem to produce the expected effect on Miss van Knut. She continued to peel her orange, and only expressed a conventional pleasure at the prospect of seeing the Countess, by way of reply.

Darlington had adopted the primitive fashion of cutting a hole in his orange, and then sucking out its juice. He now removed it from his mouth, and turned to his companion.

"She won't understand our compact," he said, solemnly.

"I guess it will be a good opportunity to drop it then," replied Miss van Knut briskly, eating her orange the while.

He stood up. His handsome winning face seemed suddenly to become vivid with a new earnestness. "I want you to understand," he said; "I want our compact to be a real one."

She also stood up; but while he had thrown his orange away, she played with hers, in a manner which seemed to betray a touch of unconscious nervousness and irritation.

"Don't be silly, Lord Darlington," she said, very quickly. Her breath came and went with a little startled flutter of surprise. "We have always been good friends; don't spoil it now."

"I know you will think it absurd; but I really love you—'pon my soul I do," pleaded Darlington, in his quaint, irresistible, boyish way. "It's very unkind of you to laugh at me," he added, as he caught sight of a coming smile.

Miss van Knut had rapidly made up her mind to pass the whole thing off as a joke. It would require a little acting; for she had been startled, surprised, annoyed—everything but amused at the declaration. And deep down in her heart there was a certain tenderness for the boy, which she was resolved should never develop lovewards in the fostering light of encouragement, and which it therefore behoved her at once to bury out of sight, trample down, and instantly ignore. When she had made up her mind to do a thing, she generally

did it thoroughly. So now a smile was summoned; and though her voice trembled a little—perhaps with suppressed enjoyment—it sounded its brightest tones as she answered, — "You are only a boy, and don't know what you are saying. I will forgive you on condition that you solemnly promise never to be so foolish again."

There would have been something almost ludicrous in the headlong earnestness, the reckless rush of declarations, with which Darlington tried to sweep away every obstacle, if real passion were ever merely ludicrous. Certainly this was the last point of view of the situation which could have presented itself to Miss van Knut. She found that it required the lightest hand, the assumption that even the idea was too ridiculous for serious discussion—the foe kept, as it were, beyond speaking distance by flights of playful arrows—in order to prevent the citadel itself capitulating in grim earnest.

At last Darlington, tired out with pleading, made more eloquent than he knew by large blue eyes, and gentle voice, and sympathetic nature, said—"Then I shall speak to your father," with a sudden air of

dignity which he must have inherited from his mother, and which contrasted grotesquely with his simple and unassuming self.

And so Miss van Knut was able to laugh outright at last. "We do not live in the feudal ages —in America," she said. "Fancy my papa delivering me up at your castle drawbridge, bound captive, to be your slave! I should just like to see him do it. Why, in America parental obedience is the great virtue we inculcate. I shall have to bring up papa to keep you at a distance, Lord Darlington."

If a joke was intended, he did not accept it. "These oranges are beastly; we may as well be going back," he said simply. And back they went, interchanging a fitful conversation, which proved to be even more disjointed than that which accompanied their ascent.

CHAPTER XV.

CLAUDIA had lately taken to sketching out of doors. She liked the long rambles, the quiet resting-place, —so quiet up there among the olives and the vines, —the peace and stillness of sitting down on some grassy bank and painting away to her heart's content, where the sounds of the busy life below, if they reached her at all, came only as a distant hum. Sometimes she sat on the shore and painted the water and rocks and the shelving sands. Sometimes she wandered inland, and took little sketches of that exquisite coast, where Nature seems to have lost herself in a tangled web of florid beauty beyond the power of any reproduction. She painted the children, stopping them as they passed with their hands full of flowers, and talking to them gently while she

drew their bright Southern faces and their little bare brown arms and legs. She sketched a wonderful old wrinkled peasant, who told her tales of battles long ago, when he had helped to fight the Austrian foe and they had driven him back from their homes and their own native land. She liked to talk to the peasants, to hear their gossip and listen to their sorrows. And she could not help thinking that their lot was harder than that of the agricultural labourers in England, and yet that they bore it so much more cheerfully, so much more uncomplainingly. She decided it must be the warmth, the sunshine, the climate, that made the difference, that gave the light to their eyes and sent the blood to their cheeks, as it bottled its own sweet essence in each of the swelling grapes, which hung in such purple bunches over their cottage-doors.

The truth was that Claudia was restless. She had tried to banish all thoughts of Claud, even to banish wonder at his silence. She did not allow herself to think of him, and then she persuaded herself she did not love him; and then she scolded herself for having permitted the remembrance of him to dwell in her memory for a moment.

And yet, in spite of all this drilling and discipline with which she rigorously schooled her mind, a gentle, half-unconscious, feminine curiosity sometimes took possession of her. She knew there was a check somewhere. Was it due to Claud or his uncle, or even to her own mother? Was it permanent? Would he go away without another word? Would they never meet again, or only as comparative strangers, she wondered; and the sweet words "I love you" from those lips never ring in her ears or burn in her heart again? She told herself that she did not love him; and still the prospect of their parting, with the casual good-byes of friendly acquaintanceship, filled her with a vague disappointment. Then a maidenly reserve would come upon her with a rush, that hurried blushes upwards, and almost fiercely struck down the memories she had been tending so kindly, as though they had no rightful place among the musings of a young girl's heart.

One day she had climbed up higher than ever. She painted vigorously,—for she found, like other people, that absorbing occupation drives out even anxious insistent thought. She painted on for

some time, until with a careless movement of her left hand she suddenly upset her painting-water.

There was a cottage a short way off, whose bright pink walls shone through veiling vines. Around its open door roses and jessamine clambered in exultant emulation. She determined to ask for some water there, and went up to the porch; but finding that her knock was unanswered, she walked in. The room was small and dark. The climbing plants had crossed the window, and their leaves let in the filtered light but slowly. Looking round, she perceived a little cot in one corner. On it lay a dark-haired, dark-eyed child, who seemed to cover her with the fixed appealing gaze of a dumb animal. The child lay motionless, and yet with those widely open eyes she could not be asleep. Was she ill? could she be unconscious? Claudia thought; and she spoke to her gently, and even touched the child's forehead with her hand. The child moved a little, and Claudia ventured to ask her in Italian if she were not ill. She answered "Yes," giving a momentary smile as she did so. Claudia sat down by her side, and taking her hot

little hand in her own, began to talk to her gently. She soon learnt from the child that she was nine years old; that two years before she had slipped out of her father's arms when he was carrying her down to a *festa* in the village below, and that ever since then she had been unable to walk. She had lain here for two long years, and had never even moved across the room. Her parents were very poor, she said, and her mother was out all day working in a scent factory, so that she was always alone all the long, long day. The poor little thing had no books, no toys, no companions; the birds grew so tame in summer, that when she sprinkled some crumbs from her dinner of bread, they would fly into the room, and even hop upon her coverlid.

Claudia asked her if she did not sometimes see the doctor. The child replied that he came only twice a-year, and then always said she would be better some day. "But some day is so long," the child said, with a weary tone in her voice, called up by the recollection of all the endless countless days that had come and gone without making her any better; and Claudia suspected that "some day" was but

the professional way of saying the doomed word "never." She could not help contrasting her own little troubles, and the so-called troubles of all the people around her, with those of this poor child, helpless, comfortless, all but deserted, on the couch before her. And without unduly moralising—for Claudia did not moralise—she unconsciously felt that as her sympathy flowed out it was replaced by a contrasting comfort.

She asked about the girl's parents, and learnt that her mother came from Sicily. Then the child's eyes suddenly lighted up with excitement for a moment. "Oh, I have an uncle there," she said, with an air of triumph, "who is a great man. He is a captain of brigands. Every one fears him—even the English. He takes them, and they give him so much money." Then she added in a sadder voice than Claudia had yet heard, for it was obviously the crowning disappointment of her life, "And now I shall never see him!"

Claudia was rash enough to suggest that perhaps he might have to run away from Sicily, and then he might come here. But the child had a touching faith that no such misfortune could befall him.

"Oh no," she said, "he is quite safe. His patron saint watches over him, because he is very pious, and after my uncle has caught any one he gives him such beautiful presents. And all the poor people love him; they will pray for him, too."

"Well," said Claudia cheerfully, "we must hope for the best. I will come and see you again very soon." She said good-bye with a smile of sympathy, which was only less beautiful than the little one winged with gladness and gratitude that fluttered for a moment around the sad child's eyes in response.

And having provided herself with water from a trough which caught a spout of mountain stream, Claudia returned to her water-colours, and sat down to paint in a far more contented mood than before.

But she was again destined to an interruption. She had not been painting for more than a few minutes, when the substantial form of Mr van Knut loomed above a jutting rock a little below the place where she was sitting.

"Well," he said in his cheery voice, "this is real nice; I've found a companion and a cunning little

seat, so I'll stop and have a chat with you, if you don't mind, for I've come quite long ways enough already." He sat down and talked on in his shrewd, sensible, extremely well-informed way: he was a very good talker, and, like many Americans, gave away his best conversation to every one with generous indiscrimination, and did not, like too many Englishmen, keep it for persons and occasions, that had been carefully selected with a view to produce the most telling effect with the least expenditure of material.

In this way she gathered a great deal of information about America during the half-hour that they sat there. And when she rose to return, he proposed that they should walk down together. He was extremely cordial in his manner; indeed it became so kind as almost to be parental. Claudia felt that, for some reason or other (and in the bottom of her heart she divined it), he wished her to consider him a true friend. Miss van Knut in her frank open way had already said to her, "Lord Darlington and I are doing our best to impress Mrs Denbigh with Mr Brownlow's charms;" and Claudia had always known that they would do all

in their power to help Claud—and herself. Probably, therefore, this extreme kindness on Mr van Knut's part was a delicate way of indicating that he also was an ally. She felt very grateful to him, and their homeward walk seemed wonderfully shortened by the friendly talk that so pleasantly occupied them.

After Mr van Knut had deposited her at her mother's rooms, he made his way to the billiard-rooms. There was a "pool" going on, and quite a crowd of men—either playing or watching—were gathered round the table.

Bertie Portland and De Barry were sitting on a raised seat at one end of the room, which commanded a view of the table.

"Never drink champagne at a widow's house," Bertie said, by way of localising a remark about the wine of evening parties.

"I never do," said De Barry.

"Once," continued Bertie, "I tasted some fizz at a widow's, which was so beastly that I looked at the label on the bottle."

"Had the bottle cast off all shame and declared itself gooseberry?"

"On the bottle was 'Fine Foaming Champagne, bottled in Dublin.'"

"Oh, my dear! weren't you very ill on the spot?"

"No; but I was next morning," replied Bertie, slowly getting up for his turn at pool; and as he did so, sparing a moment to turn his head round and add, "It was worse than anything in the Soudan, I assure you."

He did everything with a lazy and gracefully indolent confidence, that generally gave onlookers, who could not help sharing it, a certain assurant pleasure. He now "potted" the ball he was playing on, and came back when his turn was finished.

"Has Miss Rattletubs been at you yet?" asked Redburn.

"My dear chap," he answered, "she flew at me. Before I could speak, she crammed my pockets with little books for the privates. I don't know what to do with them."

"Send 'em to Smythe for a joke. Wrap them up in a piece of paper, with 'From one who fears that your heart is too much given to this world' written on it."

"I will — rather a good idea. Fancy Smythe

getting 'The Lancer's True Saddle; or, Look to your Girths, and your Drinks will take care of Themselves'! She threatens us at the Agricultural Hall."

"What! at the Tournament?"

"Yes. Are you going to do anything?"

"Tent-peg, I think," said Redburn, getting up to light his cigar.

"Red on white," called the marker.

Up rose Bertie; and Mr van Knut coming in at that moment, appropriated his seat. Redburn began to sound him on the likelihood of a repeal of the American tariff on pictures, and also asked him about the market for them in America. He was a man who knew how to launch his little paintings on the world under the best auspices and the most appreciative prices. Mr van Knut gave him as much information as he could, and then began to talk about enterprise in general, and American enterprise in particular.

"Now what could be more wonderful than our elevated railroad or your Metropolitan?" he asked, by way of a remark.

"I'm told that yours is beastly for the houses,

and ours is beastly for the passengers," put in Bertie, returned from the game, after having divided the pool.

"Have you never been in the Metropolitan?" asked Redburn.

"Once; but I found it full of horrid eager people pushing—pushing," said Bertie, in his languid way.

Mr van Knut was a little scandalised at this view of the question. To him crowds of eager people meant successful enterprise and substantial dividends. At the moment that he was going to make a protest, Darlington hurried—indeed almost rushed—in, his hat on the back of his head, his shining hair over his eyes, his face quite magnetic with excitement. "I want to speak to you," he said; and before the astonished gentleman could substitute a new protest for the one already on his lips, he found himself swept out of the room and into the Forum.

"Dear me," cried Tottie, in the midst of a feeble imitation of a French *café-chantant* singer, "Darlington's off his chump! I daresay Eliza has refused him. I can't help bursting out laughing whenever I think of Darlington in love with that girl. I'm

sure she covers her cheeks with paint. Perhaps it comes off when he kisses her. I hear his dear mamma is on the road. She'll scratch at Eliza. She has always intended him to marry one of the Stiltons,—you know, those fat girls who dress on £30 a-year each, though their father has £30,000 a-year. I've played tricks on 'em myself. We were staying in a country house together. I hid behind the curtains when I heard Darlington and Lucy coming. I thought they were going to make love. But all Darlington said was, 'Do you like chocolate-creams?' So I jumped out with a scream. She screamed. You can't think how funny she looks when she screams with her mouth open. I saw all her false teeth. Wouldn't it be fun to steal 'em some night when she is asleep!"

And yet there were people who were bored by Tottie.

Redburn and Bertie betook themselves off, leaving De Barry, who was very good-natured and outwardly tolerated *every one*, to continue as a recipient of Tottie's chatter.

Darlington had swept Mr van Knut on to a

terrace that skirted the sea-shore. It was gracefully terminated by a semicircular marble seat, copied from an antique one, and delightfully shaded by stately myrtles and clustering roses with blossoms of dusky red.

"Now," began Darlington, nearly incoherent, for once, with blushes and confusion, "I can speak to you. The fact is—of course you know—I'm in love with your daughter. I want to marry her; and she says she won't have me."

Mr van Knut could hardly help smiling at his tone of puzzled distress. Darlington evidently did not realise, indeed could not believe, that he was really refused. He spoke as though there must be a mistake somewhere, and he had come to Mr van Knut in order to have the misunderstanding put right.

"Speaking for myself, I need not say that I am extremely gratified at your proposal, and that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see you and my daughter man and wife," Mr van Knut said, in his cordial way. "But, you know, in America the parents have to let the young people settle these sort of things for themselves."

Then he added with an air which was a quaint mixture of conscious humour and powerless resignation, "If Eliza says No, I'm really afraid I mustn't encourage you."

"But I think she does love me. I am sure she likes me," persisted Darlington, looking all the handsomer for his earnestness. "I think she refuses me because—well, because she seems to think it would be taking some sort of mean advantage of me in my parents' absence." He got up; indignation—the outraged indignation of boyish self-esteem—made him feel quite hot. "She seems to think I'm only a child, instead of a man."

Mr van Knut permitted a genuine smile to alight on his face this time. He also stood up, and put his hand on Darlington's shoulder with fatherly kindness. "Believe me," he said, "Lord Darlington, it is better to wait a little. Don't do anything more till you have spoken to your people, especially as your mother is coming here in a day or two."

"I will get my mother to talk to her; she will put everything straight," Darlington said with sublime assurance—assurance which even this petted boy did not really feel; for was not his frightened

mother flying (by the mechanical aid of an express train) on the wings of maternal anxiety to rescue her darling son from the "fatal entanglement," as she called it?

"Yes, yes—you had much better wait and talk it over with her," said Mr van Knut kindly. And then he took Darlington's arm and gently steered that extremely disconcerted young gentleman homewards. His expansive kindness, his broad common-sense, had at all times a soothing influence; and now it was not therefore long before Darlington's sanguine nature and high spirits were reawakened, and he felt convinced that everything was going to turn out exactly as he could have wished.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE Countess of Downstreamdown has arrived at Pompeii," the 'Morning Post' announced. And the 'Morning Post' was right.

That august lady had arrived, and had lost no time in seeking Mrs Denbigh in order to learn the worst. Her dutiful son, who ought to have met her at the station, was at Monte Carlo. But she was rather relieved by his absence, as she would be all the more able to ascertain exactly what had happened, and how far her precious boy had compromised himself.

She herself was a woman who was sufficiently described by the imposing and inclusive adjective "majestic."

She was extremely alarming to people whom she wished to alarm. She was extremely well-bred—so

well-bred, indeed, that she was able to add a touch of the finest insolence to her manner, without its being detected as such. The days of *grandes dames* are said to be over; but she was as nearly a *grande dame* as it would be possible for any one to be in the present day. She was the daughter of a duke. Her mother had been the daughter of a neighbouring peer. Two of her three sisters had married peers. Indeed she seemed related to nearly half the peerage. Her whole mind and character had been formed in the cold rarefied air of aristocratic tradition, amid the very topmost heights of Society. Her very atmosphere was one of privileged exclusion. She breathed it, she lived in it as in her natural element; she no more felt its exhausting rarefaction than we feel the pressure of our own material atmosphere. She had been extremely handsome in a large, noble, stately way. And having all her life been very determined, perfectly calm, and serenely unworried, she still retained enough beauty to satisfy both her friends and herself. She embodied the aristocratic principle so supremely and with such perfect assurance, that you could not but feel, when you looked at her, how far England must

still be from the complete conquest of Democracy. You almost gained physical courage in her presence—that is, courage to uphold the old order and all that it involves; and he would have been a bold man who should have dared to whisper a word for democratic progress in her hearing. She was, to put it shortly, a great Whig lady, whose faith in her order, her party, its influence and its traditions, was still unshaken. And she held that the presence of persons like Cade in the Cabinet was alone sufficient to bring on it the wrath of Heaven, and to foredoom it initially to failure and nothingness.

After the Countess and Mrs Denbigh had exchanged the remarks usual to the occasion of arrival, the Countess took a seat and asked, with a calmness which might or might not betoken aristocratic despair, to be allowed to hear the worst. Mrs Denbigh had no need of the interrogation to add eloquence of expression to her already indignant attitude towards the young lady in question. She poured forth a verbal caricature, and bedaubed it largely in sinister colours from her own imagination. Lady Downstreamdown received it all. She accepted the account without, indeed, any mental

reservations, but with a determination to test it herself by the original. The time had now arrived, she considered, when some useful leading questions might be put.

"Are there any mitigations?" she asked in her stately way.

Mrs Denbigh assured her that it was generally believed that the young lady would inherit her father's fortune, as she was an only child. This information was a double comfort to the Countess. In the first place, it might add a silver—or even a golden—lining to the cloud, if Darlington should madly persist. And in the second place, it would so add to the young lady's attractions in the eyes of the world, that it might induce others to seek her, and also make her more exacting in her own choice.

"I should like to see this young lady—what is her name?"

"Miss van Knut."

"Miss van Knut! Could she be sent for, do you think?"

"Hardly," replied Mrs Denbigh, having a keen appreciation of Eliza's independence and high

spirits. "She is so—so American, that she would probably decline to come. But if we were to walk out, we should probably find her."

The two ladies strolled down the picturesque little street, and before they reached the Forum had fallen in with Mr Smythe. Whether that gentleman had actually waylaid them must remain uncertain; it was certainly an extremely fortunate meeting for him if it were accidental, for it gave him the opportunity of pointing out to the Countess all the wonders and beauties around, and also of renewing an acquaintance which before had been of the slightest. The Countess neither liked nor approved of Mr Smythe, although she hated the type to which he belonged, and which she designated "parasites," much more than she hated this individual specimen. Besides, had he not written to her a most judicious letter about Darlington's horrible infatuation for the young American person? Henceforth she decided that she would be a little more cordial to Mr Smythe when they met in Society. She was still, however, determined that he should never visit at her house. He was not even asked to Marlborough House, and there was

certainly no reason why *she* should ever receive him.

They passed through the Forum, and they looked into the little temple-like rooms on either side of it. The Countess admired the reading-rooms and the beautiful classical dining-rooms. There were banks of growing flowers; fountains playing up into the sunlight, and falling with a cool and gentle plash into their marble basins; little tables that tempted to five-o'clock tea. There seemed to be delightful people everywhere. The Countess met a dozen friends in as many minutes. Claud, whom she knew slightly, was one of these. Now she felt that he would be invaluable as a source of further information, and so she proposed that he should give her some tea at one of the cosy tables. Mr Smythe felt that he was dismissed. He walked off with Mrs Denbigh, leaving Claud to wait on the Countess. When the snowy cloth was enriched by a delightful spread of tea-things and tea-cake, the Countess began to lament the dreadful incident which had brought her to Pompeii.

She had not, however, lamented long, before Claud rose up as a champion, not only for Darlington—

which was only right, and what might have been expected—but for the young lady as well. He assured the Countess that when she came to know Miss van Knut, she would find out what a really noble nature the girl had. The Countess was obviously not reassured.

Claud pushed back his chair, and became almost eloquent on Miss van Knut's behalf. The Countess put it down in her mind to the blinding fascination of young ladies over the susceptible hearts of the opposite sex.

At last he thought of a conquering stroke of comfort.

He leant forward again, and said in his most confidential voice, "Do you know, I really believe she would not have Darlington if he were to ask her."

The Countess felt almost sure that such an attitude on the part of any young lady's heart was practically an impossibility. And yet she cherished the forlorn hope of anything so abnormal as almost too good to be true. She leant back in her chair, and held up her double eye-glass in order to survey the company.

"Who is that very good-looking man over there —the one who is so beautifully dressed?" she asked, with the air of a lady who is privileged to interrogate.

"Redburn, I think you mean," answered Claud, looking across the room to where Redburn and Portland were also enjoying an innocent five-o'clock tea. "I daresay you have heard of him —he paints."

"Yes," said the Countess. Then she added, "When I was a girl, young men in Society didn't paint."

"I suppose the account about Clive's being an artist in the 'Newcomes' is not exaggerated. You remember how shocked the Park Lane people were at his painting."

Lady Downstreamdown did not respond with any further reminiscences, but asked him who the other young man was with the charming smile. She had often met him, she said; but he had never been introduced to her.

Claud told her that it was Bertie Portland, who was considered to be the most charming and the most socially caressed young man in London.

"Of course; I knew his father," the Countess said, and would have dropped her glasses, had not the appearance of an advancing girl rapidly passed across their field of vision.

Claud did not give her time to inquire who the young lady might be. "That is Miss van Knut," he said quickly, fearing that that young lady had already come within range of his voice.

"Introduce me," said the Countess solemnly.

Claud went up to Miss van Knut and told her that Darlington's mother had arrived, and was anxious to make her acquaintance. He had no need to make any further explanations, for Miss van Knut came forward with frank alacrity. She was not in the least abashed or embarrassed. She took the Countess's slowly outstretching hand in her own and shook it warmly. "I am real pleased to meet you," she said, without a shade of self-consciousness; "Lord Darlington has talked to me so much about you."

"I can wish no better recommendation than to find that any one whom I hope to be friends with is already a friend of my son's," said Lady

Downstreamdown, with a certain old-world ceremonious courtesy which was at least impressive.

The two ladies sat down. Claud had discreetly retired. Miss van Knut felt a strange unreality, a vague artificiality, beneath the words of the Countess. It was as though she had wandered into some old chateau, where, amid ancient furniture and musty heirlooms, she had been received by the great lady of the house —hooped and powdered—with all the stately ceremony of regal times in other centuries. She longed above all things to bring the conversation down to her own plebeian and practical level.

"Are all Lord Darlington's lady friends yours also?" she asked, for the sake of saying something, and with an innocent air, which she would have been the last person to have been capable of assuming, had she either realised or been capable of understanding all the ground that the question might be supposed to cover.

The Countess was not disconcerted, simply because it was impossible by the laws of her being that she ever should be. But she covered her astonishment with a fixed look, which in any one

else would have been a stare. She drew in a breath as though to fill up her reservoir of collecting forces, and said, "My son has, I daresay, many chance acquaintances which I have not the pleasure of sharing; but we naturally like to know any one with whom he is intimate." And then, after a moment's pause, as if she were deciding how far to go, she said, "Our son would never, I am sure, form any serious attachment without our sanction."

Miss van Knut was suddenly seized with an irresistible desire to tease this great aristocratic lady, whose mental momentum was sufficient to overbear any but the most resolute and plucky of mortals. She was helping herself to a cup of tea; she paused, and looking up at the Countess with the sweetest of smiles, said in an inimitably simple way, "Then I am still more glad than ever that we have been able to meet." She suddenly dropped her eyes, as she continued, "For if you like to meet Lord Darlington's intimate friends, you can imagine how delighted they must be to have the pleasure of meeting his mother."

She felt that she had thrown the gauntlet down

at last, and had probably succeeded in absolutely frightening her companion. Knowing that, in reality, she had refused his lordship, and that she was therefore an entirely harmless person, she felt a delightful exultation in this.

The Countess was now (as a classical author might say) divinely armed with awful majesty for the coming combat.

"Are you one of his intimate friends?" she asked.

"He says so. He says we're very intimate for Europe," replied her companion in her most collected manner. "I'm much more intimate with most of my gentleman friends in America; but then in Europe they say that girls can't be very intimate with gentlemen. At least Lord Darlington says so: he has been teaching me deportment—European deportment. May I trouble you for another cup of tea?—thank you so much. He says I haven't reticence enough—or 'hypocrisy,' as he calls it. Is a great deal of hypocrisy necessary in Europe before one can be considered well-bred?"

"Yes," said the Countess, becoming monosyllabic

in her dignity, and determined not to follow up any side issues that might be presented to her. "But in Europe, Miss van Knut, a certain amount—I will not go so far as to say of reticence, but a certain amount of reserve and discretion, is expected from every young lady. I daresay we vary from America in this respect, as we do in so many other ways."

Miss van Knut knew that she had provoked the outburst. She therefore restrained herself from feeling incensed—in this way differing from most of her sex, who are generally unable to look at their own attitude, and the attitude they have provoked in others towards themselves, with impersonal impartiality. She simply contented herself with a change of front, having admitted to herself that her present one was becoming slightly false, and said, "I hope you will like me a little better when you come to know me."

The Countess was almost touched by the artlessness of the appeal. "I am sure of it," she said kindly.

"And as far as I am concerned, you can set

your mind at rest," continued Miss van Knut, a little hurriedly, and with the air of making somewhat of a confession. "I have already told Lord Darlington that this marriage is impossible. In short, I also will withhold my consent; and so you see"—as she spoke she looked up again, with just the slightest twinkle beginning to struggle in her eyes for an acknowledged existence—"we can combine to refuse our sanction to this serious attachment."

The Countess rose up slowly.

"My dear," she said, "you should not conceal your discretion so thoroughly, for you have really a great deal. I need not tell you how deeply we thank you for"—she was going to say, "for this sacrifice," but checked herself, and substituted, "for having treated our son's passing fancy as it deserved."

"But I guess I don't really love him."

"Oh no," murmured the Countess.

"And that is why I refused him. If I had really loved him, I should have said Yes in spite of every one."

"Of course," the Countess answered, feeling that

now, all danger being over, she might cheerfully oil the troubled waters with a few acquiescences. Through it all, she felt a vague wonder at the young girl's conduct. No English girl, she mentally decided, could nerve herself to such a great renunciation. She was going to add an expression of hope that she should have the pleasure of seeing a great deal of Miss van Knut in the future, when she was interrupted by the sudden appearance of the young gentleman himself from Monte Carlo.

He hurried in, and then stopped for a moment as though paralysed. His face, which was a delightfully expressive one, told with an almost ludicrous distinctness how extremely disconcerted the naughty boy was at finding his mother engaged in apparently confidential talk with his own Eliza.

He recovered himself in an instant—the pause and the expression had come and gone like a breath—and rushed up to his mother. They exchanged greetings, among which he managed to insert an apology for his absence during her arrival.

"And how much of your money have you lost at Monte Carlo?" asked Miss van Knut demurely.

"How much do you think?" he asked in return.

"You must not allow him to go there any more," said Miss van Knut to the Countess, taking no notice of Darlington's question.

"My dear boy, what would your father say if he knew you frequented that dreadful place?" asked his mother, with her reproof thus modified and softened by the indirectness of its sheltered attack.

"He would probably say, 'You damned young fool,'" replied Darlington, with a dance of delight in his eyes at the startlingly literal truth of his answer.

"Hush!" said his mother. "How much have you really lost to-day?" she asked, by way of turning the conversation.

"I've won £20," he said, with a triumphant air of having "scored" off his mother's surmises.

"That will come in very nicely when we are at Venice," said the Countess.

"At Venice!" responded Darlington blankly.

Then the Countess informed him that she was intending to proceed to Venice in a day or two, under his escort. Darlington did not intend to go, and indeed hinted as much. But the subject was

not further pursued. The three got up as soon as Darlington had refreshed himself with some tea, and went out into the Forum. The band was playing. People were sitting about enjoying the comparative coolness of the air after the warmth of the day. The whole place was so inviting, that the Countess and her son took a couple of chairs where they could listen to the music and watch the moving people, who were slowly walking up and down to earn the relaxation that comes from gentle exercise. Miss van Knut had taken the opportunity of quietly slipping away, so that mother and son were left alone together.

The Countess had too much tact to touch on the dangerous subject, and would have entertained the young man for an indefinite period with accounts of everything which had been going on in England which in any way interested him. But Darlington plunged at once into the middle of the dear topic that filled his soul to overflowing.

"She will not have me," he cried, with despairing brevity.

"My dear boy, I want to speak very seriously to you about this young lady. I am, I admit, more

favourably impressed by her than I expected. But in this life we may meet many people who are both agreeable and whom we become fond of (whom we 'fall in love with,' as you express it), but whom it will not do to marry. A man in your position, my son, must not propose to the first girl who catches his fancy."

"Well, mother, I never did it before," pleaded Darlington.

"And must never do it again," added his mother quickly.

"I shall never do it again if she won't have me."

"She had the good sense to realise that it was an offer which she could not accept," said the Countess deliberately.

Darlington cried out that she could and must accept it. He poured forth his love into his mother's ears. And that astonished lady suddenly realised that she was expected to further his suit by all the means at her disposal. She determined neither to argue nor to reason with him at the present moment. But at the same time she did not see that there was much chance of an immediate start for Venice.

Darlington was a young gentleman whose charming manners had generally secured him his "own way," when all other reasons for getting it had failed him. Never before, however, had his "own way" been at such cross-purposes to that of his parents. And his mother was acutely aware that it would require the most skilful tactics (and she was an accomplished tactician) to "play" him successfully.

He settled himself in his chair, his hat slipping back from his forehead a little, so that his hair peeped out under its brim; he stretched out his long slim legs, and plunged his hands deeply into his trouser-pockets—an attitude always assumed by him for assisting determined thought — before he announced that as soon as "other people" departed for London he must also return; for the elections might come on at any time, and his mother knew that it was his duty to be looking after his expectant constituents.

The Countess began to talk over their county Division with him. The last notes of music found mother and son immersed in congenial plans for his future career in Parliament; and for the moment

she felt assured that, even if love had not taken a lower place to make room for ambition, the fierce joys of the coming contest would finally tend to obliterate the perversely amorous yearnings of her troublesome son.

CHAPTER XVII.

We must now return to some of our other friends at Pompeii, who had been pursuing their several ways without being troubled by any thoughts of marrying or giving in marriage. Mrs Leo, for instance, had long before this exhausted all the attractions that the place might at one time have offered her. She was extremely anxious to start as soon as possible for Sienna. There, in the midst of the solemn, stately, old-world city, she hoped to absorb the medieval atmosphere, and intended to write a historical novel after the style of Fortini. It was to be full of a delicate and exotic voluptuousness. It might prove to be a little wanton and overwrought, perhaps, in its languid loveliness; but it was to be charged with a subtle breath of art and culture. There would be scenes in gay Italian castles

—castles not grim and darkly stern as in the North, but bright with all the dainty life of gentlest feudalism, mellowed by sunshine and sweetness and joy into the urbane grace of Southern chivalry. There would be gallant knights and noble ladies, with glorious faces, passionate natures, and subtle faculties for good or ill; falconers, grooms, and pages leading the milk-white hounds. Soldiers and attendants would fill the galleries and people the courtyards. There would be banquets, with perhaps a lurking cup of poison amid the flowers; pageants and festivals, happy parties encamped beside the forest-trees or wandering along the paths of the trim gardens; love with the moonlight mother, tuning the silver lutes and mandolins that would whisper their serenades so discreetly beneath remembered casements timidly opening on to the warm and amorous night. In a word, Mrs Leo intended that it should be a delicious novel of the *cinque cento;* and considering the people, the manners, the morals, and the life of the age amid which it would have to pick its way, it is probable that no man would have been daring enough to attempt to write it; and therefore, if it had to be written at

all, the task could only have been undertaken by a lady.

Mrs Leo had also had a slight misunderstanding with Lady Marlowe. It had happened in this way:

The two ladies had met at an ice-shop, where even Mrs Leo occasionally condescended to refresh herself.

Mrs Leo, whenever she was eating ices (and she was extremely fond of them), felt that she was, to a certain extent, giving a hostage to feminine weakness; and in order to counteract this attitude in the eyes of the world, she always on such occasions assumed her most defensive and divinely arrogant air.

Lady Marlowe, on the other hand, was always prepared to cultivate anybody and everybody. She had come over to Mrs Leo's table, and had begun to chatter to her about various things, not feeling in the least disconcerted by the replies that she had received being entirely monosyllabic in their character. At last she had asked her about the Fabian Society, of which Mrs Leo was a leading member, and Mrs Leo had answered that probably Lady Marlowe was incapable of understanding either their motives or methods. In reply to a further ques-

tion, Mrs Leo had stated that they all sat round a room and denounced the awful tyranny and degradation of capital, and longed for the day when they should have a real Commune in London. At this Lady Marlowe had been unable entirely to restrain her sense of the ludicrous; and Mrs Leo, being unable to restrain her temper, had said, "You are just the sort of woman that I should have expected to ridicule all efforts for the advancement of her sex." Lady Marlowe, still retaining her temper, had laughed outright at this uncouth retort. She had, however, inquired, as Mrs Leo was leaving the shop, whether the wicked report was true which said that any person whose manners were even conventionally good was ineligible for membership.

After this event Mrs Leo refused to speak to any one with whom she had not what she called "spiritual sympathy." And it ended in her speaking to no one. But she, who was superior to most things, was certainly superior to any inconvenience caused by an absence of conversation. As she herself used to declare, "I can't understand people who say that they find it so hard to do right. I have no difficulty at all. I have no temptations."

The day for their departure to Sienna had been fixed, when Mrs Leo became extremely unwell, and after a day or two it was pronounced to be low fever. Already several people had suffered from feverish attacks; for the truth is, that when Pompeii was planned sufficient attention had not been given to the drainage. In all other respects it had exceeded the most sanguine hopes of its promoters. It had been a great international success; and if it had not been kept quite as select as some had hoped that it would be, others had, on the other hand, found it proportionally amusing.

The London season was now beginning. Many of the English were preparing to start homewards. In two or three weeks they would all have flown. The *coupés lits* on the Northern trains were engaged for many days in advance. But in spite of the English winging their way to London, it did not seem as though their passage would have any eclipsing effect on the constant festivities of the place. French and Italians, Germans and Russians, kept still arriving, and it appeared probable that many of them would remain on through the early part of the summer.

It was such a lovely little place, embosomed in the soft seductive scenery of that Southern shore. The life was so free, so varied, so delightful. "It was almost as good as being at college again," Claud declared in a moment of enthusiasm. There were such charming people from every country—the sea was so fresh, the air so balmy, and (as some people said) Monte Carlo so conveniently near—that it was no wonder English people lingered on rather than hurry home to face the struggle of "the season"; or that foreigners, having just despatched their own, should hasten here for change and relaxation.

One of the last events in which the English were to take part was to be a grand entertainment organised by Mr Smythe. It was to consist of one or two little comediettas and an imitation music-hall entertainment. A fear was expressed that some of the foreigners might think the latter somewhat vulgar; but Mr Smythe reassured them with the information that a real music-hall entertainment had been given at the New Club with the greatest success, and before the most select of audiences. Miss van Knut and Darlington were

to play in a little piece called "During Family Prayers." Two young people who are staying in a country house come down to breakfast, and finding that the door is shut and prayers have begun, they are constrained to wait outside on the mat. The young man is in love with the young lady, but he is diffident, she is an heiress; and this, his last morning in the house, has arrived without his having had the courage to propose. They talk about indifferent subjects, and chaff one another; just at the last moment he, listening at the key-hole, says, "They are beginning the last prayer."

She replies, "The servants will be out in a moment."

Then he makes his offer. The young lady hesitates. He drops on his knees. Prayers are over. The door opens.

She whispers "Yes"; and turning to the invisible company within the room, says, by way of explanation, "We in the hall have also been having our family prayers."

It was a little piece which depended more on the brightness of its dialogue than on its action. It was very pleasant, however, when well played; and

there seemed every likelihood that it would have justice done it on this occasion.

The rehearsals were now going on every day. After the event in the orange-orchard, Darlington was inclined to sulk. But Miss van Knut was determined that the performance should take place as though nothing had happened.

The music-hall entertainment, which included a Christy-minstrel performance, was being organised by the men, and the smoking-rooms were nightly filled with members humming their songs and talking over their "business."

The smoking-rooms at all times were a pleasant rendezvous in the late evening hours. Crossing the dark deserted Forum, with the sudden breath of coolness and the calm still evening sky above, always recalled to Claud a tender memory of his college days — days when he used to saunter to some friend's rooms across the old familiar "quod," which seemed more venerable and still more romantic under the night's enhancing charm, and so plunge in a moment into the midst of all the light, and warmth, and gaiety, and hospitable brightness of old panelled rooms, that echoed out

into the listening gardens the laughter, and the fitful chatter, and the songs of a snug party of congenial men, immersed in all the known delights of flannel *blazers* and most comfortable attitudes, and over all of whom a thin blue cloud of soothing smoke hovered perpetually.

On this particular occasion Claud did not encourage his memory to lull itself with dreams of Oxford, nor did he remain in the smoking-room. He went on till he came to a large *loggia* which looked across the water, and had been built for outdoor smoking in fine weather.

It was one of the prettiest nooks in the whole place. Delicate marble pillars supported a frescoed ceiling, and rested on a darkly tinted floor of quaint mosaic, that led out on to a broad delightful terrace rising directly from the tideless sea. The walls were frescoed. Classical scenes loomed forth in tones and colours which were subdued into a perfect harmony. A copy of the little Neapolitan Narcissus shone out in grey-green bronze, standing upon his pedestal with all the gallant grace of antique boyhood. Another pedestal was crowned with a slim lamp, after a Roman pattern,

whose tiny flame was dedicated to our latter-day cigars and cigarettes. This, and the numerous extremely comfortable chairs that stood about, appeared to limit the concessions that had been made to our degenerate age. But these concessions were at the present moment in extreme request.

Most of the chairs were occupied, and everybody was smoking. The conversation of the company was sufficiently informal and fragmentary to proclaim that the majority of the speakers belonged to our nation, and were at the present moment completely at their ease. The talk, indeed, was absolutely fitful and inconsequent. It came in small disjointed phrases and then lapsed, supplanted in most instances by an eloquent and conclusive puff of smoke. Out on the terrace Portland had arranged his handsome person in a chair, and, leaning back with half-closed eyes, he seemed, if possible, more languidly content, more gracefully inert, than ever.

Perhaps this habitual attitude was a little emphasised by the insistive presence of Mr Gradley, for that gentleman was boring him extremely by trying to get an article out of him on the campaign in the Soudan.

"Now couldn't you," said Mr Gradley, in his most insinuating tones—"now couldn't you let us have something on the subject?"

"But I don't know anything about it," responded Portland, in his sweet, low, inexpressive voice.

"You've been there," continued Mr Gradley. "You might write me a little thing from quite a new point of view. You needn't sign the article if you would rather not. And then you might write from the point of view of a private, or of a correspondent, or of an enlightened subaltern adversely criticising the whole affair from the standpoint of his superior experience and technical knowledge. You might even write as a Canadian boatman or an Egyptian camel-driver."

"My dear chap, I couldn't," said Portland, becoming colloquial in his quiescent impatience. "All I know about the whole affair is, that I sat all day for weeks in a stinking boat—that is, when we hadn't to get out and haul the thing over rapids. And then I was shoved on a beastly camel and jolted across the desert, where we couldn't even wash. After a day or two we killed a lot of awfully fine black chaps, who nearly did

for us. And then I got enteric fever, and managed to get home on leave."

The arrival of Claud at this moment gave Mr Gradley an opportunity to retire, for he saw that any further efforts were useless.

"Been doing anything to-day?" said Portland, in a tone which showed that the words were intended as an interjection rather than an interrogative.

"Trying to learn a song," said Claud, while he toyed with his cigar. "They've asked me to sing a thing, in a suit of 'dittos,' called 'I'm the chap that mashes Lottie.' I haven't the faintest idea what the thing's about."

"Oh, I should think you'd do it all right."

There was a pause, and both young men smoked on in absolute content. The night was still and beautiful. The sky seemed luminous, although there was no moon. Innumerable stars rained down a glitter, or veiled their faces in a twining scarf of Milky Way. The vague immeasurable spaces of the sea sank far away into the deep mysterious distances of solemn darkness. The tiny waves spent themselves lapping on the neighbouring steps with a monotonously drowsy whisper.

Claud let his thoughts pass onward to the future. How should he reconcile Mrs Denbigh to his love? How should he win again his old place in his uncle's heart? Suppose he hurried back to London, and plunged into his work with diligence, redoubled in addition to renewed. Would he be happier, toiling on through the long terms, perhaps for nothing—perhaps for a success which, when it came, would only hold a barren satisfaction? For if we do not take a pleasure in our work for that work's sake; if we struggle with distasteful occupation in order to procure some ultimate, much-coveted position or attainment,—when it is gained, it will be found to be but a hollow recompense. Ambition will continue to make its presence felt, and all the fierce desire for an expected happiness will still hang like an enticing rainbow, always a little way beyond our reach.

And then the vision of his dusty chambers filled Claud's mind, illuminated by the pallid light of apprehension. He seemed to see the very panes of glass that wanted washing, whose thin obscuring veil of gradually perpetuated fog would throw a still more sombre light upon those rows of endless

law reports that grimly ranged themselves in austere decoration; upon the musty documents imprisoned in their dull red tape; upon the chill pervading air of legal study. The future seemed to loom before him through the medium of those darkening panes. The years would slip by; if the briefs came with increasing quickness, the years would only pass the sooner. The one demure and silent clerk would register their passage by a gradually deepening wrinkle, a stray grey hair, an imperceptibly increasing stoop beneath the ever heavier pressure of Time's silent hand. Claud was not precisely morbid, but he was extremely susceptible to all the conditions, both adverse and favourable, of his environment. His mind was so highly strung as to be almost painfully sensitive in its responses to surrounding facts. He felt small passing trifles—a face, a voice, a momentary incident—to be either sympathetic or antipathetic. And in the governing of his actions, his instincts and emotions contributed the lion's share of motive. Indeed such influence had they over the springs of thought and movement, that when he mastered his intuitive desires, thwarted his impulses, and

made concessions to the voice of duty, they showed a tendency to neutralise and render barren the desired result. Yet, in spite of all this subtle resonance of nature, this delicate discrimination of appreciation and dislike, he had a judgment which was both reliable and singularly clear from all illusion. A vivid sense of humour came to the aid of a large stock of native common-sense, and thus enabled him both to perceive and fight against his weaknesses. If he ever yielded to them, he always realised that the submission was made with open eyes.

But as he sometimes said (the sentence is characteristic both of his humour and of his attitude towards his own personal nature)—"True happiness may be occasionally found in the audacity of knowing distinctly what your duty is, and then *not doing it*."

He now suddenly rose up to the surface of affairs from his plunge into these reveries about the future. He was recalled by nothing more than the extinction of his cigar, and indicated his return to consciousness by asking Portland for a light; then added, by way of giving tongue to some

unformed ideas that were still lingering in his brain—

"Don't you hate people with pale worn faces, and irritable, overwrought, over-developed minds and brains?"

"I must say I like some flesh and blood about a chap. Besides, those sapping people bore one so. But I'm very liberal-minded myself," added Portland, with an air of princely magnanimity. "I don't bar intellectual people, so long as they keep their intellect out of their conversation."

Redburn and Darlington came up and settled themselves in chairs near the others. Claud made his presence felt by shying cigarettes at Darlington, for at the present moment he felt particularly flippant after his momentary dalliance with a foreboding future.

Darlington quietly collected them and filled his case, with the remark that if Claud liked to keep him in cigarettes by making him a target, he didn't care.

"'I'm the chap that mashes Lottie;
I'm a Piccadilly toff,'"

hummed Claud to himself.

"My dear boy, what are you singing?" asked Redburn.

"It's a kind of song I've promised to sing at this concert."

"It sounds rather drivelling."

"You'd think it still more drivelling if you heard the whole of it. What the foreigners will think of us, I don't know. Luckily they won't understand much about it."

"That reminds me," cried Darlington, "that I must learn my part. Would you mind hearing me? there's a good fellow," he said to Redburn. And pulling out his book from his pocket, he began—

"'*Enter* JACK (stops and looks through the keyhole). Just my luck. They've begun family prayers, and I am once more doomed—doomed to spend a dreary quarter of an hour upon this mat. To-day—to-day——'" he hesitated.

"'I take my departure,'" prompted Redburn.

"'I take my departure, without, alas! having declared my love.' It's such awful rot, you know!" broke out Darlington in the midst of his part. "A fellow never talks like that."

Redburn assured him that on the stage such language is expected, and that at the present moment he must not criticise his part, but try to learn it. So Darlington returned to the recital, and his voice was heard monotonously making the most passionate appeals in a rapid and disjointed undertone.

"Who is that Johnnie over there?—one of your mangy sort, I should say," asked Portland, indicating Mr Leo, who had been discoursing with the discouraged Mr Gradley.

"Hush, Bertie! he'll hear you," replied Claud, as Mr Leo made his way towards them. He came up, and, sitting on the balustrade, began to talk to them. Mr Leo was a man who could talk extremely well when he chose, and now he indulged them in some of his brilliant paradoxes.

He maintained, for instance, that pain is only an intensified form of pleasure—that they are opposed to each other, not in nature but only in degree, in the same way that cold is merely a relative form of heat. He then proceeded to inform them that vice is virtue out of harmony with its surroundings; and that as dirt is but useful matter in the wrong place, so sin is nothing more than misplaced good-

ness. They acquiesced instead of arguing with his statements. They both imagined that he was simply talking for amusement or effect; but they were too lazy to take up the cudgels of orthodoxy, in case they should be wrong, and he should be really expounding some of his numerous views.

"You are rather transcendental," said Claud, by way of a conclusion.

"You're only trying to 'draw' us," added Bertie, unsympathetically.

"I must plead guilty to being a Platonist," said Mr Leo, loftily. "And with my master I therefore tend to be a transcendentalist."

"And we are 'Sporting-Timeists,'" put in Bertie, with a brutal disregard for any seriousness remaining.

Claud remarked that many people seemed inclined to become theoretical, ideal, about the future. "Even Miss Rattletubs," he said, "with all her little plans and schemes, would probably call herself a Platonist—if she understood what it meant."

"She has more ability than one might give her credit for," said Mr Leo, leaning back and looking up starwards. "I find that she writes a good deal for the press."

Portland just opened his lips and slipped out 'The Queen.'

"No, not 'The Queen,'" responded Mr Leo. "She writes in the living press. She wrote that extremely interesting article, for instance, on 'Autonomy for India' in the 'Morning Gazette.'"

Light leapt to Claud's eyes as the blood leapt to his brain.

"How do you know?" With one burst of breath he asked the question.

"She told me so herself," said Mr Leo, with perfect quietness and matter-of-fact simplicity.

For a moment a buzzing in Claud's ears had overcome all other sounds, and every sense of colour had left his eyes, as it leaves the eyes of one who is about to faint.

Now it surged back upon an upward rush of joy. Everything seemed lit up by far more luminous and brilliant colours than reality can ever give. He heard Darlington's voice solemnly reciting, "O child, child, do not trifle with a strong man's heart!" Redburn's replying, "That's not the way to say it;" and Darlington's resumption of, "Oh do NOT trifle with a strong man's heart!" Then all

his feelings burst upon the air in a delighted little laugh.

"What's the joke now?" asked Bertie.

But Claud could only answer that he laughed because the night was beautiful and he was happy. For sudden happiness like his takes up its abode and nestles itself near the heart in various ways and with diverse expressions. Welcomed as a stranger or as a familiar guest, it does not pause to fret itself about the method of its utterance; it mates instinctively the sad young soul, and both are joined as in a marriage made in heaven, without one fear of severance, one alien thought.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AND now we come to a sad and shameful page of our story, which it were best to pass over quickly.

For its development requires a false and almost libellous assumption. It is necessary that we suppose the Prime Minister (at the time of which we are writing) to have been capable of declaring a policy so shameless and so ruinous, that even his own party were aghast; and honest, honourable, and independent members of that party were forced to publicly denounce it.

Now if we were to have invented a policy which was only a little base, only indirectly unjust and remotely injurious, we might have been fairly accused of making a spiteful caricature, a malicious perversion.

We will therefore avoid doing this. We will

suppose something so horrible, so equally opposed to every profession and principle of either party, so injurious to England, ruinous to Ireland, and destructive to the empire, *as to be impossible of belief.* In a word, we will assume the Premier's scheme to be a Home Rule Government for Ireland.

We have felt less reluctance in inventing a monstrosity like this, because no one for a moment can possibly be deceived into believing that such a scheme for the betrayal of their country could ever have been endorsed by the great Liberal party.

An idea so absolutely fantastic and so ludicrously inconceivable as this, is harmless.

We have passed, when we suggest such actions, far from the controversial planes of politics to immaterial realms where irresponsible imagination holds playful sway.

No one—not even a Liberal himself—can cavil at a fancy which boldly claims to be fictitious and impossible. Indeed this apology is hardly necessary when we remember the consistent conduct of their party—how justly and how sternly they rebuked the Tories at a late election for *permitting*

the Irish to vote for them; when we recall the words and actions of their leader — our late great and good Prime Minister,—how scornfully and how persistently he always has condemned all pandering to Irish disaffection, and passionately denounced everything tending to the weakening of the Union.

Do we not recollect his memorable words (at least we Tories do, for some Liberals appear to have forgotten them): "Can any sensible man, can any rational man, suppose at this time of day, in this condition of the world, we are going to disintegrate the great capital institution of this country, for the purpose of making ourselves ridiculous in the sight of all mankind, and crippling any power we possess for bestowing benefits through legislation on the country to which we belong?"

Only last autumn were we not strengthened by his scathing words of indignation against any who might threaten the United Kingdom with disruption?—

"Every man, woman, and child amongst us is convinced that it is the will of Providence that these islands should be bound together as a United

Kingdom; and from one end of Great Britain to the other, I trust there will not be a single representative returned to Parliament who for one moment would listen to any proposition tending to impair, visibly and sensibly impair, the unity of the empire."

And with these noble words still ringing in our ears, I do not think that there is any fear of our mistaking this light fiction for recorded fact—of our confounding the base, destructive, treacherous Minister who has been for the moment conjured up to suit the exigencies of our story, with the enlightened statesman who has ruled over us, and whose grand and patriotic sentiments we have just quoted.

Having thus firmly established our fiction, and proved it to be a fiction so satisfactorily, we may now proceed to develop it. But if any reader is anxious to know more about the nature of the Bill, about its details and "the lines" on which it is supposed "to run," the author is afraid that he cannot satisfy any curiosity concerning this unnatural creation of his brain, as his imagination is far from unlimited in the sphere where such an

inconceivably base Government may be supposed to dwell.

The reader must therefore be content with supposing that even Mr Cade left the Cabinet rather than support such a measure, and that it was equally opposed by all the leaders of both parties.

Lord St Kevan was amazed and dumfounded. There is hardly a word in the language strong enough to express his feelings. Every faith, every belief, every tradition of his lifetime seemed to have been swept away. He felt as he would have felt had he awoke one morning and found that two and two made five, or had been requested by his own servants to black their boots and carry up their coals for them. Numerous other friends of his, in the same plight, called on him, and gave vent to their feelings in their most expressively characteristic ways. It was this that prevented his wondering if he had lost his head, and convinced him that at any rate the Premier must have lost his.

The awakening was terrible. The shock of knowing that a Liberal Prime Minister was capable of such treachery was not so great, because he had long suspected that the Premier was capable

of *almost* anything. For him, it was the realisation that such an infamous scheme should have been permitted for a moment by the rest of the Cabinet, by influential Whigs, by anybody for any time, which was so bitter.

He suddenly knew, as truth is sometimes flashed upon us in a sheet of fire by an overwhelming catastrophe, that the right government of England by trained, enlightened, and experienced statesmen, born of great families, with all the strength of mind and breadth of view which privilege bestows, is doomed.

The Whigs have been too long unconscious, lulled to sleep in the Delilah arms of the Democracy. They have boasted that their strength is in their principles, their policy, their statesmanship; and once, twice, thrice they have risen up triumphant, but still have not lost faith in their Delilah. At length Democracy has soothed them once again, and once too often, into the realms of fatuous slumber; and now they wake affrighted and too late—wake to realise that Democracy has robbed them of their strength, and that in the nearest future they may have to grind in the Phil-

istine's prison-house, bound with the brazen fetters of the caucus.

Thoughts somewhat like these were Lord St Kevan's. He suddenly realised the anomaly of belonging to a party all of whose measures he individually disapproved of. And although he did not admit it to himself, he had been in his heart a little piqued at the neglect which the party seemed to have shown him during the last few years.

It gradually dawned upon him, as a resisted and unpleasant fact eats its way into recognition, that if he wished to assume a really logical position, he ought to leave his party and become a Conservative.

The wrench for such a man would be terrible. Uprooted from every belief and tradition which had nourished him through life, and which had formed the soil where he had grown and flourished, he would now find himself transplanted to an alien shore; he would be compelled to take the nutriment of fresh ideas, imbibe new springs of conduct, accept surroundings strangely unfamiliar.

He talked over his position, his attitude, with

other men in whom he placed complete reliance and confidence.

"It is not I that am leaving my party," he used to say, "but our party which are leaving—which have left us."

"I don't see that our becoming Conservatives will in any way help to prevent the Prime Minister's ruining the country," said the Duke of Oxford, who had a clear perception of facts, and an uncompromising way of bringing them forward when perceived.

Lord St Kevan replied that he did not suppose that in these days such a movement on their part would make any material difference, or help to arrest the downward rush towards anarchy and ruin; but that, for himself, such a change would make him feel more comfortable, more at his ease. He could not help almost regarding himself as a traitor to his party, while he still belonged to it, and yet so disapproved of all its later conduct that in his heart he knew he wished success to its rivals, and hoped that it would fail.

He had, as we know, a delicate sense of honour, an extreme conscientiousness about all the relations

of life. His aristocratic nature shrank from a false position; and if he believed that the position included its share of meanness, there was no sacrifice he would not make in order to avoid adopting it.

Therefore he decided that for him the more honourable course would be to make the announcement that he had finally severed his connection with the Liberal party.

And now the reader will see why we were compelled to invent our little Home Rule infamy. It was necessary that Lord St Kevan should be driven out of his party; and this could only have been done by the invention of a supposititious policy, as base, as monstrous, and as shamelessly faithless as this one would be. We have frankly acknowledged it to be a foundationless fiction; and therefore no one can say we insinuate that such an idea could ever have been really entertained or acted on by either party.

At Pompeii the news was received with much surprise. Claud was astonished. He had believed that the inherent and inherited Whiggism in his uncle's blood would have been sufficiently sturdy

to withstand even this shock. He wondered what effect it would have on the relationship in which they stood to one another. He determined to wait until his uncle should break silence. Besides which, at the present moment one thought alone filled his brain. He must see Miss Rattletubs, and learn if she were really responsible for the fatal article.

He found her giving away tracts (in Italian) on "The Social Science of the Day" to some little peasant children on the beach.

She welcomed him with one of her concise, inclusive smiles.

"Really, Mr Brownlow," she said, "you're quite a stranger. I am summoned home. I have to help at Exeter Hall in May, and they have asked me to speak on the approaching end of the world at the Mildmay Conference."

"How long do you give it?" asked Claud, giving her a moment's respite to pour forth her newly reservoired ideas before he approached his own subject.

"Fifteen years," she answered promptly.

"Now I always put it at eighteen years," said naughty Claud.

"Do tell me how you arrive at that. By what argument, by what convincing argument, do you prove it to be eighteen?"

"Same way as your people prove it to be fifteen,—by a method of ingenious guess-work."

Miss Rattletubs was pained at this levity. She assured him that most of the earnest seekers in the Revelation, and the leading modern authorities on prophecy, had come to the solemn conclusion that it was fifteen. "I myself," she went on glibly, "have made some further researches. 'The little book' which has to be swallowed, but which is afterwards bitter, is the Home Rule Bill. The two witnesses who are *expressly* told to leave out the court of the Temple for the Gentiles, are obviously our noble Premier and our Irish Secretary. If any one would injure them, does not fire proceed out of their mouths and destroy their enemies? and have they not the power (by forcing Ireland into civil war) 'to smite the earth with plagues as often as they will'? Next, the beast ascends and makes war against them and overcomes them—that is, they are defeated. But soon they come to life again (return to office), they

stand upon their feet, they are triumphant. Now I will prove to you," she continued, with increasing gusto, "who the beast is who overthrew the witnesses. We are told that he had seven heads —obviously, the seven *Churches*,—and ten horns with seven crowns—obviously, seven *hills*; besides which, he had the name of blasphemy upon his heads. The name of blasphemy is of course Rome, and Rome has seven hills. The dragon (who I greatly fear is the late Lord Beaconsfield) gave him his power, and his seat, and his great authority. You remember that the people worshipped both the dragon and the beast. Then the other beast that came out of the earth, we have decided, is the Primrose League, the two horns being the two words 'Imperium et Libertas.' The second beast forced every one to worship the first beast, and forced every one, small and great, rich and poor, to wear a mark in their right hands or on their foreheads,—merely, of course, a poetical phrase for button-hole. Now about the number 666. There must come a moment when the League has exactly 666 habitations, and at that moment the prophecy will be completely fulfilled. That is

the only reason," she added naively, "why I am anxious for the League to spread."

"I always understood that 'the beast' was supposed to be Nero," said Claud.

"Nero! Absurd! Why, where would be the interest of identifying current events, and being able to foretell future ones, if the beast had been Nero?"

"That is just what I suppose all commentators have felt," answered Claud, a little crushingly; "because each generation of them, for the last eighteen hundred years, has always tried to claim 'the beast' as a contemporary, and has generally succeeded in proving his identity with some contemporary enemy."

"Yes; but then, in this instance, as we are right, they must be wrong."

Whenever Miss Rattletubs "felt warm" about a subject, she was accustomed to expect her auditors to accept her statements as proofs. She considered that nowadays young men were too sceptical in their crotchets, too cavilling in their reception of authorised information.

"And now, Miss Rattletubs, what I have really

come to trouble you about is a rumour I have heard that you wrote an article on Cade's opinions about India in the 'Morning Gazette.'" Claud was going on to explain why he was asking such an inquisitive question, when Miss Rattletubs interrupted him by at once acknowledging that she was the authoress.

He saw the clouds rolling back before his future, and welcomed the coming sunshine.

"I have been accused of betraying a secret—a more or less State secret," he said. "I was supposed to have been the only person who knew what was said at the interview. I have been unable to clear myself, because I did repeat its substance to one person—a lady; and though I was sure that she repeated nothing, yet I could not of course find out who had written the article, and so prove myself innocent."

"I had no idea it was a secret. Mrs Denbigh told me about it, I think," she answered lightly.

"Mrs Denbigh!" Each link of the chain was in his hand.

"I was talking Cade over with Mrs Denbigh. She was calling him a dangerous man. I was

standing up for him. Then she repeated to me what M. Courier had told her, in order to convince me. I of course was delighted. Home Rule for India is just what we want. They say that if the poor Indians were once independent, they would abolish all their heathen customs, and zenanas, and nautch-girls, and all unite together to form a great kingdom like England. And we didn't know at that time that the Prime Minister was in favour of Home Rule for Ireland, because he had just declared that he was absolutely opposed to it."

"Cade used to speak as though he were in favour of Home Rule for Ireland; but now even he can't swallow the present Bill."

"He'll have to give in to us in the end," said Miss Rattletubs, with her cheerful habitual assumption of omniscience; "and they say that he isn't what he was—he hasn't as much power as he used to have in Radical circles. I wrote the article in the 'Morning Gazette' to show that he was really sticking to his principles. I had a conversation with M. Courier, and got the details out of him. One has to use a little tact about those things, you know."

"Thank you so much! Then you really think that you have moved a step in the direction of autonomy?"

"I am sure of it."

"You may yet give valuable assistance to the fulfilment of prophecy," Claud could not help adding, though he was afraid that his companion might regard his suggestion as intentionally humorous, and therefore perhaps a little profane. The thought of doing so, however, never for a moment occurred to her earnest and literal mind.

"I am sure I hope so," she said cheerfully. "I always do my very best, whenever I see my way clearly, to help it in any way. I think we all ought to do that."

"Well," said Claud, as he saw that she was preparing to take her departure, "I am awfully obliged to you for having acknowledged the article." And then he asked if he might use the information he had gained. His companion assured him that she had not the least objection to his telling anybody. She picked up her little hand-bag, which always accompanied her, gave Claud her hand, and was gone.

Claud took a long walk. He wanted a quiet time to think over his affairs. He was determined that he would have everything prepared before he again spoke to Mrs Denbigh. This time nothing should be left to chance; he would not be again discomfited. Should he write to his uncle, or speak to Mrs Denbigh first? He sat down on the shore and threw pebbles at the waves. The afternoon was very warm. He pulled off his clothes and tumbled himself into the sea. The bracing cold of the water seemed to do his heart good. He found a rock from which he could take "headers," and plunged again and again into the liquid depths of the encircling ocean. At last he scrambled out, and throwing himself at full length on the adaptable comforting sand, he warmed in the sunshine, languidly piled up the neighbouring shingle into a little heap, and encouraged his mind to make itself up in favour of writing to his uncle at once.

He was awakened from this perfectly and refreshingly childish operation by Redburn's voice.

"Please keep still," it pleaded, "I am putting you into a study."

"*A hint in nudity and sand,* I should think," called out Claud.

"Don't ridicule my style, you wretch! Don't jeer at my life's work! It will just be a vague and delicious suggestion of colour. Pale-pinkish limbs against pale-yellow sand; a brown head for the highest point in the picture, which will be framed in greenish gilt: there you have it. I really think I must get Lord St Kevan to buy it."

"Call it what you like, so long as you don't say it's a portrait of me," cried Claud, beginning to find his way into his clothes.

"All right, old chap."

They walked back together. Claud was in the highest spirits. And when Redburn assured him that he was in rather a childish state of mind that afternoon, he admitted the fact, and excused himself by assuring his companion that for once he really felt almost irresponsible for his actions.

"Not drunk, I hope?" said Redburn, humorously.

"No; jolly. An afternoon like this makes one in love with living. After all, whatever Democracy does, it can't deprive us of the sunshine, and the sea, and our bathes on the shore."

"I'm not so sure about the bathes. Bathing will probably be found to be contrary to some by-law or other; and you'll be prosecuted for a misdemeanour."

Claud's energy was not even then exhausted. He got a boat, and took Redburn out for a pull.

The same evening he wrote a long letter to his uncle, explaining everything, and enclosing a scrap of paper which Miss Rattletubs had cheerfully given him—she was really extremely good-natured—and which duly acknowledged her responsibility for the fatal article.

After this he went down to the room where the rehearsals were being held. He sang his song with considerable *brio* and dash. Then he sat himself down to witness the comedietta in which Miss van Knut and Darlington were to distinguish themselves. They played it with becoming seriousness, till they reached the point where Darlington had to seize her hand and murmur, "O child, child, it is bitter, bitter! Do not trifle with a strong man's heart!" He gave this forth with such portentously solemn emphasis, and in such an appallingly

tragical attitude, that Miss van Knut burst out laughing.

"You're not to laugh. You spoil it all," cried Darlington, with his words caught up in a little gust of temper.

"I guess that's quite a little too fresh," she said, still laughing.

"I don't care if it's fresh or not. It's in the book, and I mean to say it."

"I don't care if it's in the book or not," retorted his companion; "if you say it in that tone of voice, I shall laugh right away."

"If you do, that'll be the right way to spoil the piece. I must say it in that way, because I can't say it in any other." Darlington was becoming obstinate.

"Then the piece will be spoilt," said Eliza, with a sudden assumption of dignity.

"Yes, by you," answered Darlington, stalking out of the room at a pace which was calculated to secure him the retention of "the last word."

"And now," said Mr Smythe, "Madame la Duchesse de Rochfort will be kind enough to give us her imitation of a French farmyard."

CHAPTER XIX.

TIME with Claud during the next few days flew by, winged partly by his happiness and partly by a tiny residue of dread about the coming interview. He had to pacify, not "score off," the mother of his love. He was sure that she had entirely forgotten her talk with Miss Rattletubs, and that she had not the faintest idea that she herself was responsible for the publication of the report. How would she take the information? In order to show her that he was innocent, he would have to prove to her that she was guilty; unconsciously and unintentionally guilty doubtless, but at the same time guilty of the very act for which she had so severely censured him. Would she be generous—or even just enough — he wondered, to give him all the benefit of the situation, and to render to him the

justification which was his due? He longed for the interview to be over. He watched Mrs Denbigh as she moved about in her beautiful dresses, calm and collected, with all the unconscious assurance of inviolate virtue; and his dread increased.

He boated and bathed. He played lawn-tennis, and wandered away across the olive-coated hills, in long, delightful, solitary walks. He even tried one morning to perpetrate another sonnet, but was surprised in the midst of the second line by the appearance of Miss van Knut. She was also taking a lonely walk, and was delighted to have lit upon a companion.

"When are you off for England?" she asked.

"Soon," he answered, not knowing how soon it might be.

"Won't it be real lovely to be in London?" she exclaimed.

And then, as they walked back together, they became almost confidential on the subject of Mrs Denbigh. Miss van Knut did not hesitate to express her scorn of that lady; but Claud was sufficiently circumspect only to admit that he thought

her very complete, and a wonderfully maternal mother.

"You are all so frightfully docile in Europe," broke in Miss van Knut with sudden petulance.

"Are we?"

"Yes, to your surroundings, conventions, status."

"In a word, to the suitable."

"Even people like Mr Leo come here because it's so suitable."

"But even you wouldn't come here because it's unsuitable," Claud retorted. "By the way, have you heard that Mrs Leo is really ill with typhoid?"

"Yes; and several other people have got it also. Papa says the place isn't properly drained. And he's a great authority; for, you know, we live on a drain."

"On a drain?"

"In New York. I guess that's how pa got his money." Then she suddenly changed the topic of their talk. "Haven't you got an elder brother?"

"I've got a brother Bob. He's shooting lions in Africa."

"And I suppose he's the boss of the family?"

"Of course. He comes into the title and all that. I'm nobody."

"Well, it makes me feel just mad," said Miss van Knut, with decision.

"Why?" asked Claud, coming to the aid of his order.

"That one brother should have more honour and money and position than another, simply because he was born first."

"Well, you see, after all it is better that one brother should have it than neither, which is what would practically happen in the long-run if both were equal."

"Oh, you're a Conservative!" said Miss van Knut, with delightful contemptuousness.

"Darlington would say the same—or at any rate think the same—though he's a Liberal."

"I don't call him a bit of a Liberal," she said with emphasis.

"But he is. I've tried to convert him, but it's no use. He has official Whiggism in his blood—inherited from a long line of ancestors. All I can get out of him is, 'They're a rum lot; but we've always been Whig, and had something in the Government—and *I'm* not going to change.'"

"Bah! you're all alike." And they reached the

gate before they could settle the abstract rights of inheritance.

At last one morning Lord St Kevan's letter arrived. It was almost as long as one of those letters of his to the 'Times,' which used to come forth to the world on the middle page, arrayed in large type and "leaded" columns. It chiefly dealt with the reasons which had induced him to join the Conservative party. It was so full and detailed as to almost become his *apologia*. Its explicitness was touching. It seemed to ring with the sadness of a recantation. It did not allude to Claud's letter until it had fully explained Lord St Kevan's position, and then it said—

"Need I tell you that I am as delighted as you can be at the proof of your innocence. As you know, I never believed that you were guilty of betraying a secret imparted in confidence—at the worst, I feared that it had leaked out through your indiscretion; but what to me was so terrible was your inability to *prove* yourself innocent. If you still think that I did you an unconscious wrong, I know you will forgive me, for in this world of

ours, so full of both equivocal intention and doubtful motive, we all are liable to make mistakes and even fatal errors, with the best and the most honest of intentions; and therefore we should be, I think, as ready to grant forgiveness as to ask for it. I hear that there will probably be an early dissolution. The Home Rule Bill will probably be thrown out in the Commons,—certainly out in the Lords,—and it will give me great pleasure if you will stand as the Conservative candidate for our Division of the county. Let me know your wishes as soon as possible, and believe me your affectionate uncle,

"ST KEVAN."

"Dear old uncle!" Claud said, as he finished reading the letter. "How he must have felt leaving his party! Has he resigned at Brooks's, I wonder?—Brooks's, where he used to go and plan out his party's campaign, and draw up those lists of the Cabinet which we used to find lying about when we were boys. It is hard to realise that he has really held office in three Liberal Governments—events change so fast. Perhaps it will soon be hard to realise that any enlightened and independ-

ent statesman ever held office in a British Cabinet at any time.

But although Claud tried to think of his uncle as we try to force our delighted selves to think of the giver when some treasure of happiness comes to us from another, he could find no room in his heart for anything but the joy-bringing words that flashed to his soul from the concluding lines of the letter.

Really to stand for Parliament at last—and for his own Division, his own native Division! He saw himself hedged with exciting incidents and absorbing interests. He could picture himself hurrying along, heading the canvassing party, dropping in and out of the various cottages, laying siege to the labourers with argument or jest, and winning over the wives—Claud was sure of the wives—by a little playful flattery, and bribing kisses discreetly distributed among the babies. He knew that every one on and around his uncle's estate would vote for him. Their affection for him was such, that they would almost feel insulted if he did not take their support of him as much for granted as they did themselves. He had lived amongst them all

his life. When he was quite a small chap he used to spend half the long days—those long, long days of childhood, so comfortable and so quiet that they come to seem almost endless—among the labourers in the fields. He used to ride on the plough in early autumn, which turned over the fragrant earth so solemnly, and watch the great, good, patient horses toiling beside the pink-cheeked farmer's boy, who filled the child's small heart with envious ambition by an enormous and delightful whip he cracked continually. Sometimes he wandered with the keepers through the wet plantations and saw the pheasants fed, and, when he grew a little older (it must be admitted), shot them. One day the men showed him a fox's earth: he gazed at it with reverence, and wondered if he could not have a little fox for a tame playfellow. So his delight may be imagined when his next birthday brought him a woolly cub, which soon came to exact a share of the love devoted before wholly to his pony. There was not a cottage in the village down by the mill-stream where he was not sure of welcome, and where he would not find the tea and thick enticing bread-and-butter brought

out to do him honour. And thus the slow years passed, made up of an interminable string of calm and lovely days. As he grew older, school and college claimed him; but he came back each holiday — grown handsomer and taller, the people always said, as soon as they caught sight of his bright face and winning smile.

The peaceful days of summer could not lengthen themselves so as to hold all the various things there were to do; while in the winter he would wander far with his gun over the crackling leaves, beneath the brown and leafless branches, on days which came between those most exciting days of all, when there was hunting, and his favourite horse carried him, as on wings, across the country. The very clink of his spurs as he came down-stairs to breakfast gave him a little thrill of pleasure. And when he felt the warmth of coat, the clasp of breeches, and caught his pink reflection in the tall old mirror on the way, he always momentarily found an added fondness for himself — a sudden sense of fitness in that bright and light-limbed apparition. As he came back from hunting—his tired horse walking at its own discretion

—"good-nights" were generally exchanged with every home-going labourer, before the welcoming lodge-gates were reached, which led so quickly on to tea, a comfortable chair, a warm bath possibly, and all the hospitalities waiting to give refreshment and repose to his contented body, a little wearied by its healthful exercise.

Most of his life had passed away somewhat like this, amid those rural people, and the gentle, adequate, monotonous sufficiency of their surroundings. He knew that every one up at the dear old place—"home" to him always—was fond of him, and that no canvassing could be needful in his own familiar neighbourhood.

For Claud possessed a rare persuasive nature that captivated all—even the unsusceptible—and lent a subtle atmosphere of sympathy to all who came within its influence. He was himself wholly unconscious of this charm. He only knew that every one was always very kind to him, and welcomed him so warmly, out of the goodness of their hearts. There were, however, other neighbourhoods to conquer, meetings to hold, speeches to make, and all the necessary duties that claim a candidate's at-

tention; and he felt that he ought to be moving homewards as soon as possible.

Claud was neither conceited nor priggish. He did not cherish the belief that his return to Parliament, if it took place, would make any material difference in the future course of our affairs. Had any one asked him what his programme was, he would probably have replied, "At first to wait and listen"; and if they had further pressed him for views as to the right conduct of the Government, he might have added that at the present moment what was most wanted was a Government whose executive could be relied on to prove firm, dexterous, and consistent; and that until this was secured, its legislative functions might with advantage cease to be so all-absorbing and so questionably adventitious.

But as his election address, when it is finished, will let us have some further insight into his views, we will return with him to some of the more practical affairs of the present moment.

First of all came the interview with Mrs Denbigh. He found her in, alone, and expecting him;

for he had sent a little note beforehand asking her for an interview. She rose when he entered, and received him with perfectly complacent kindness. If she felt any surprise, there was no sign of it apparent in her manner. She even smiled a little as she told him that when his note came, she had just been sitting down to write and ask him if he would care to come and say good-bye to them before they left for England.

"Then I'm additionally glad I called," said Claud, brightly.

"It is a pity Claudia is out, because I am sure that she will be sorry to miss you."

"Perhaps I may take your note for written, and call again in the afternoon."

Mrs Denbigh could not refuse a murmured assent; and there came a pause for a moment, perceived by both, before Claud continued—

"You know that my uncle and I had a slight difference about a confidential communication which came to be published; I have been able to satisfy him as to its authorship."

"Ah!" Mrs Denbigh whispered the word, with an air of unconcern which was slightly exasperat-

ing. She seemed to regard the affair as one which in no way concerned her.

"Miss Rattletubs has been kind enough to permit me to mention her name. It was she who wrote the article in the 'Morning Gazette'; and as she admits it, her informant's name need never be mentioned."

Remembrance seized Mrs Denbigh, and recalled to her mind each word she had spoken that day to Miss Rattletubs. With one breath, as of gathering wind, it lifted the mists of forgetfulness—every detailed fact stood forth, etched on her memory.

"Have you already mentioned it?" she asked instinctively.

"To no one."

"You are very generous," she said, rising; "for I am sure that you might have practically cleared yourself with your uncle had you told him my name. You will believe me, that when you spoke to me last I had entirely forgotten that I had repeated the news to any one. The mention of Miss Rattletubs' name has recalled it all to me."

"My uncle has become a Conservative," went on Claud, beginning to break fresh ground, "and he has asked me to stand for our Division as a Conservative. I have accepted; I feel it a great honour. My brother Bob, you know, isn't exactly political," he added, almost apologetically. "All he cares for is shooting fierce animals in outlandish places. That is the reason, of course, why my uncle has been kind enough to offer it to me. I think that I may say I have been reinstated in his good graces."

Mrs Denbigh resolutely faced the consequences of their mutual explanation and forgiveness. She decided in a moment that she must be generous as well as just. She said instantly, "I shall be delighted to hear of your success."

Claud felt a liquid heat in his throat which he tried to gulp down, but which came pumping up from his heart in spite of his efforts.

"And now you will let me speak to your daughter," he said. "I am sure you will;" and he caught Mrs Denbigh's hand automatically.

She presented to him her finest smile as she said, "You must feel that you have conquered. I

withdraw all opposition. We must leave the decision to Claudia."

"You are very good—how can I thank you?" was all that he said, as he bent his head over her hand and gave it a grateful and timid kiss.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS LEO was dangerously ill. There were also several other cases of fever. People had not yet taken any general alarm, but there was a prevalent feeling that the Southern season was fairly over; and the crowded trains moving Northwards unmistakably registered this. Those English who were not starting within the next day or two were only remaining until the grand entertainment was over, before taking their departure.

Now that the later spring had added an ardent warmth to the endless sunshine, the little place seemed still choicer, still more ideal, and charmed increasingly every day with its gradual growth of resource and dainty experience. If there was illness, the life of the place went on, apparently unconcerned and uninfluenced by its presence.

Lawn-tennis continued from morning to night. The courts were made of marble mosaic, and the pattern being either coral or delicate grey colour, gave a soft tone to the eye, and did not glare oppressively in the sunshine.

Claudia played a great deal. She was very good at tennis, as at almost all games. Her alertness and supple quickness were wonderful. Quite a little crowd of admiring spectators would gather round when she and Darlington—also a first-rate player when he chose to exert himself—were having a match. At the tennis tournament, Claudia drew Redburn against Miss White and Darlington. The set proved a very close one; the finish was most exciting, and it ended with Redburn and Claudia winning by one point only.

In the gentlemen's singles, Darlington beat Redburn, but was beaten by Bertie; for the graceful and languid Bertie displayed a remarkable mastery over most things, when he cared to induce his lovely and much cherished self to contend in a game or exercise. His "indolent sweetness" of manner still seemed to possess him, but his strokes were as certain and swift as a champion's; and his

disgusted opponent generally grew demoralised after a game or two. He was afterwards beaten, however, and the prize was finally carried off by a "county champion." Tennis was not the greatest, although it was one of the most universal, of amusements. The greater part of the players kept it as a resource when there was nothing more special on hand. Yachts came, and encouraged much-sought-after luncheons in cosy cabins — not persistently rolling, but resting as still as though trained by the taming shore into perfect repose. Lord Mawnan had not returned; in his place a beautiful schooner yacht had come with the Duke of Oxford, and a capital moonlight dance on her deck had been the result. Five-o'clock teas, which members were able to give in their own rooms to their friends, had become quite the fashion. The Princess of Chioggia still continued her delightful little afternoon parties in her classical atrium.

Lady Marlowe was often "at home" to her friends, and every one asked was sure of a bright welcome, the best of strawberries, and a certain superior quality of conversation which made it a privilege to find one's self there.

Lady Marlowe expected all her guests to exert themselves somewhat for the general good of the whole; and if only the guests can be persuaded themselves to acknowledge this duty, it is surprising what a brilliant result may be obtained. In nothing did Lady Marlowe show her cleverness more than in this; for her guests were not only made to realise what was expected of them, they even attempted to duly fulfil their part of the understanding, and follow the perfect example of their brilliant hostess. "If you can't be anything else, you must be amusing," she used to say, quite as a matter of course, to the young men who clustered around the door. One day she met Tottie, and boldly told him that he had behaved so extremely foolishly at her last party, that she did not intend to invite him next time. Lady Downstreamdown appeared at one of them. She was affable, but she did not entirely approve of her hostess. She thought her wanting in dignity, and too much given to lending her countenance to equivocal "movements," as well as to people whose antecedents were very obscure, and whose incomes proceeded from sources difficult to ascertain. She particularly

disapproved of Lady Marlowe's activity on behalf of the Primrose League. She regarded the League as both frivolous and mischievous. The Whigs require no such support; *her* husband had always held office under a Liberal Government without the aid of such childish tomfoolery.

Lady Downstreamdown accepted Miss van Knut at last as a wonderful specimen of the American girl. She acquiesced in the young lady's right to have a different standard, another code of behaviour, a fresh assortment of conventions. She even came to admire her for some of her points. Perfect ease and unconscious straightforwardness Lady Downstreamdown had always held to be definite signs of breeding, and Miss van Knut had both these virtues to an almost bewildering degree.

She felt more than relieved and most truly thankful that the young lady had had "a sufficient amount of self-respect" — so she termed it — to refuse Darlington's mad request.

But in the bottom of her heart there remained a slight residuum of pique. Her own Darlington exposed to a rebuff from the daughter of "an American sewage-man"! It must be put down, with

everything else, to those unknown, unknowable instincts and motives, and "general ways of going on," that appear to belong to countries which are not in Europe. She was not accustomed to let her curiosity about anything long remain unsatisfied, and she quickly made up her mind to ascertain why Miss van Knut was not ruled by our laws of nature.

"My dear," she said to her one day, "you will excuse an old woman's asking you rather a delicate question. But I want to know why you didn't accept him?"

"Because I don't love him," said Miss van Knut shortly, as though that were conclusive; and then suddenly carried the war into the enemy's country by asking in turn, "Why, what other reason could there be, Lady Downstreamdown?"

"I should hardly have thought that was a sufficient one — under the circumstances," said the Countess.

Miss van Knut felt inclined to retort that the Countess was right; there was another: every one (including Darlington's mother) would have accused her of laying herself out to entrap his lordship.

She hesitated, and then she suddenly said, "Lord Darlington is such a boy—such a mere boy."

"You are quite right," said the Countess, with her good-humour quite reinstated. "He is only a silly boy. You show your wisdom in taking no notice of his foolish passing fancies. He imagines himself in love—every few months—but it passes off." This last statement was not strictly true, but was added to emphasise the intended moral.

"Under his mother's treatment?" was the conclusion which was offered by Miss van Knut; and the Countess had to accept it as best she might.

The satisfaction of curiosity was not the only duty that Lady Downstreamdown had to perform. It required the utmost tact and maternal watchfulness to keep Darlington properly occupied. He refused to leave Pompeii, either for Venice or home, until after the coming entertainment. The only thing, therefore, left for his mother to do, was to keep him amused. She tried to throw him with any young lady who came within range. She cultivated Mrs Denbigh; and it may be imagined with what assiduity her efforts were backed up by that lady. Claudia and Darlington were already old

friends. They had often hunted and fished together, and had seen a great deal of each other in the easy ways which exist (or may be discovered) in large country-houses. Darlington's doings generally took the direction in which he unconsciously found least resistance. And now that the silent unrealised powers had decreed and arranged a companionship for him with his old playfellow, he naturally found himself constantly with her. The two had all sorts of interests and amusements together. He was taken to see the invalid up in the vine-covered cottage — "the little brigand," Claudia always called her. They used to pretend that she was the captain of the troop. "I have brought you a prisoner—such a grand prisoner!" she said to the child; and then turning to Darlington, told him that he could not escape without paying a ransom. "It's usual for people's relatives to ransom them," Darlington said, and further suggested that as Claudia seemed to be one of the troop, indeed their decoy, she should go back to his mother and get the money from her.

"Very well; I'm quite ready to go," she answered demurely, and laughed to herself at the

notion of Darlington left quite alone with an invalid child, and unable to speak a word of Italian. She kissed the child and walked out of the cottage.

"Here, I say, don't go without me!" called out Darlington inconsistently. He rushed out of the cottage, but the "little brigand" found five silver francs in her hand as the result of the visit. All her powers of simple adoration had before this been lavished on Claudia; but now they were shared by the beautiful gentleman, who looked like one of the blessed saints, and had showered such unspeakable wealth upon her.

Perhaps Lady Downstreamdown and Mrs Denbigh would not have felt equally satisfied with their little arrangement, had they been able to overhear some of their young people's conversation. Instead of falling in love with each other, Darlington and Claudia spent much of their time in discussing how Miss van Knut should be induced to relent.

"She simply laughed at me," Darlington complained.

Claudia knew how often laughter is a wavering

danger-flag; is simply assumed for defence—not so much to expose the light heart as to conceal the heavy one.

"She may say what she likes, but I am sure she cares for you," Claudia said, her quick woman's instinct vibrating like a divining rod over the golden ore of love.

"Then why doesn't she have me?" cried Darlington, almost pettishly.

"Pride, I think. A woman, you know, who respects herself, has a great deal of pride. She knew that if she accepted you, every one would believe she had simply been scheming to catch you. She knew that your people would be furious, and would never forgive her. Americans have a great deal of independence."

"If that's all, I'll soon settle her," replied Darlington, resolutely; "and now we had better get back as quick as we can, as there's what my young brother would call 'an awful swagger storm' coming on."

The same evening Darlington and Miss van Knut were to run through their little piece together. It was not to be a regular rehearsal, and the

stage-manager had fixed to have it in his private sitting-room when the time came. They got on pretty well, as they both knew their words; and if fluency did encroach upon passion, they were after all only trying it over. Although the stage-manager was out of the room — being absent a minute on business — they continued the piece. Miss van Knut looks through the keyhole and exclaims—

"'Ah, now they have commenced the last prayer; in one brief minute we shall be at liberty to enter.'"

Then Darlington replies, "'At liberty to enter! I would rather be bound to remain.'"

Lucy retorts, "'Like a dog that's shut out from his dinner.'"

And Charlie replies, "'I would rather be a dog and be shut out with you, than be an angel in there devouring my morning beef-steak and coffee.'"

Lucy, "'You don't consider my feelings, it seems.'" And she begins to sob and murmur, "'But it serves me right for missing prayers.'"

At this point Darlington has to fall on his knees, and he certainly did so with great energy. "'You shall not miss them while I am by; you shall listen to mine—for I love you.'"

To which Miss van Knut, as Lucy, has to reply —"'You may feel like a dog when you're talking to me, but you need not take me for a bone.'"

Now comes the famous speech—

"'O child, child! it is bitter, bitter! Do not trifle with a strong man's heart!'" Darlington gave this in his exquisitely ludicrous way, and Miss van Knut burst out laughing as usual.

"You mustn't say it like that, Lord Darlington; you mustn't throw so much energy into it."

"I can't help it."

"Then I can't help laughing."

"I can't put less feeling into it, because I am not simply acting. I really mean it; you know I do."

"Gracious! the idea of your really calling me 'child, child'!" she said, laughing afresh. "And your talking in earnest about your 'strong man's heart'!"

"I can't help the bosh in the play," he said, hotly. "I love you; you know I do. If you won't hear me, I'll make you laugh on the night—I swear I will. But if we can only get properly engaged by then, you see we shall be able to act it so much better."

"Oh you funny boy!" was all that she answered.

"I swear I will be funny, and make you laugh."

"I guess I shan't laugh, whatever I do," she said, as the stage-manager's return compelled them to finish the piece in real earnest.

Games, and rehearsals, and five-o'clock teas with the ladies, did not exhaust the men's list of amusements. Some of the gayer and more ardent spirits were said to indulge in the evening in festivities which assumed the nature of practical jokes. It was reported, for instance, that some excited and unrighteous young men undressed Mr Smythe and tumbled him into the swimming-bath, and that when he had got himself out at the other end his clothes were nowhere to be found, so that he had been compelled to walk home wrapped up in a bath-sheet. Even if the story were true, he apparently thought it best to say nothing about it. For Mr Smythe was a gentleman whose social pedestal was chiefly composed of conveniences to other people—and he knew it. If, therefore, there was anything to be gained by becoming an object for the practical jokes of the *right* young men, it was best to submit with as good a grace as possible.

Mr Leo felt that such affairs should be put down with a high hand. If they were not stopped at once, *any one* might find himself the next victim, and Mr Leo did not at all relish the chance of a similar escapade. A scathing article came out in 'The Highest Aim' the following week on "The young man as a savage," and perhaps would have ensured the catastrophe which it denounced, had it been seen by any of the tormentors.

Darlington was not the only person whom Claudia had taken to see her "little brigand." Mr van Knut had been one of "the prisoners" captured, and Claudia had promised to take Prince Chioggia's children with her the next time she went to see the child.

So one fine morning they all started forth. Claudia ran races with them, and told them that she would teach them lawn-tennis if they would like to learn. The small children were delighted, but the eldest boy said, with a quaint childish air of dignity, "I cannot play tennis—I am a Roman."

And Claudia could not help smiling at the little Roman prince's unconscious and unintentional scorn of the barbarous pastimes of our savage North.

They soon arrived at the cottage. The children gazed at the small invalid with a mixture of awe and sympathy. They gave her some chocolate which they had brought for her, and then they were seized with a childish shyness that gave them nothing to say. The child also looked at them without speaking; but in her it was silent adoration that held back her speech from utterance. A child sometimes feels this sudden passionate admiration for another—a feeling akin to worship rather than love, as though the other were a visitant from another world. And on account of the very strength of this feeling, the child is filled with a speechless reserve, a reticent shyness, almost amounting to shame, which makes it fiercely strive to conceal its feelings from everyone, and prevents it from being able to talk to the very child who has so suddenly captivated its little heart.

The invalid looked on the other children as she might have looked had four child-angels come in through the door with presents in their hands and a halo of golden sunshine all round them.

"And now," said Claudia to the children, "I am going to read to Guilia, so perhaps you had better run away."

They said good-bye; the boys kissed Claudia's hand, in their pretty caressing Italian way; their governess, who had remained all the while as a kind of material background, followed them out, and they were gone.

Claudia sat down in the warm stillness of the cottage by the child's bedside, and began to read to her. She read on and on, not heeding the passing minutes. The child lay quite still on her little bed with her eyelids closed. Claudia at last thought that she must have dropped off asleep. She closed the book, and sat watching the insects that flashed from flower to flower in the sunny garden. A monotonous hum of happy occupation filled the air. The breeze was heavy with all the scents of early summer. The spirit of slumber passed in from the hot external sunshine, and dwelt amidst the drowsy shadows of the cottage.

Claudia idly wondered if she too were fated to succumb. She felt the spell gathering, and thought that sleep's gentle dominion would soon prevail,

when a shadow touched the doorway. She turned her head. It was Claud.

"I have heard all about your little patient, and have come to see her," he said as he entered. He was warm with his climb, and a chair was inviting him. He sat down; but his eyes did not rest on the child's pale face—pale even against the white pillow. They gave Claudia an unspeakably tender glance, and then looked on the ground with a sudden retreat into shyness.

"We must be very quiet—she is asleep," said Claudia, gently.

Claud put a little packet of cherries which he had brought for the child on the pillow close to the little nestling face. The crimson bloom of the fruit gave a look as of death to the wasted cheeks.

"She will think that another good fairy has been here when she wakes. I am afraid you will all spoil her." Claudia stooped slowly forward and picked up a cherry. "I must have just one for myself," she said. "They are too tempting."

"We will each have one for luck," said Claud, picking out two of the reddest and ripest for the talisman.

"The child is asleep; we shall only wake her by staying. I think that I, at least, shall be going back."

"It is so peaceful here; let us sit on a little longer. We need not talk above a whisper."

Claudia did not assent, but she did not move. She felt a drowsy quiescence steal over her. The warmth of the day had made her sleepy, and it was pleasant to acquiesce in a whispered request that they should linger a little longer in the cool and shady cottage. Yet in spite of this passive contentment, she felt far away, in the unfamiliar depths of her nature, a strange movement stirring; a thrill as subtle as some magnetic fluid, which touched every nerve into kindling alertness, and became the prophetic herald of an approaching crisis.

Claud also felt himself borne along by the spell of opportunity, and still they sat in silence a little longer before he said gently, "Do you remember that night — that lovely night of the ball — when we floated out seawards, and lingered and lingered?"

"Could I have forgotten it?" Claudia answered, in almost a whisper. Her eyelids fell and her

cheeks grew hot, she scarcely knew why. She continued hastily, "It seems such a long time, doesn't it?"

And Claud murmured, "Yes. Many things have happened since then. And now that we both are going—going away, I want to tell you once more how I love you." They both rose instinctively. "I may tell you now, for all my troubles have cleared away. Claudia, darling, will you be mine, for ever and ever?"

She did not wonder, or reason, or pause. She could not. A wave of maidenly passion so sweetly strange, so strangely sweet, broke over her, with its unknown, unrealised, unexpected enchantment; and she found herself clasped in the arms and pressed to the beating heart of him whom she evermore must love and cherish through all eternity.

There was a moment's pause. Only the slumberous hum of the busy untiring bees made faint music out in the happy garden, and the fitful stir of the poor little invalid told them that they were not yet alone.

"My darling, I am so happy," was all that Claud said, still holding her in his arms. And then, as he

stooped to kiss her, the child suddenly opened her eyes.

She was not surprised. She smiled as she said, "Have you brought another beautiful gentleman here to see me?"

And Claudia, turning round with a smile caught from happiness, such as comes only once to each of us on this side of the grave, said, "Yes; the most beautiful gentleman of them all, for he is going to be my husband."

CHAPTER XXI.

As no Liberal Prime Minister—or indeed any Prime Minister—would ever in reality propose anything so unpatriotic, unstatesmanlike, and unscrupulous as a Home Rule Bill for Ireland, we will not dwell on the details of this impossible little fiction, which has only been invented (as before stated) because no other conduct on the part of a Liberal Premier would have been base enough to drive Lord St Kevan over to the opposite camp.

But though the author cannot undertake to describe the consequences of this measure, we need not be prevented from speculating a little on what might conceivably happen if anything so impossible were ever really to be proposed. One can fancy, for instance, the dismay of the Liberal

party — the dismay of the many at having so soon to eat their words, and explain away their frantic denunciations of the Irish party, and their indignation at the infamy of an (imagined) compact between that party and the Conservatives. For it may be concluded—by pessimists—that no idea of resistance to their leader would occur to the many, even though such resistance were demanded alike by consistency, honour, and honesty. One can fancy the still greater dismay of the few whose consciences and reasoning powers were in fair working order, and who, being neither cowardly nor shameless, would feel compelled to oppose the leader by whom they had been betrayed. Imagine the vindictive fury of Mr Giles and his caucuses at any one daring to be honourable and honest, reasonable and consistent, in opposition to their commands and the commands of the leader, who was none of these things!

Mr Giles had not so much welcomed the Bill on account of any supposed good it might do for Ireland, as because he had believed that it would pass "the Commons" and be thrown out by "the Lords."

"See," he had cried with unctuous glee, "what a capital chance it will give us for attacking 'em! After they've thrown it out we can put all the subsequent disorders down to them—and there'll be plenty of disorder, I promise you. I daresay there'll be anarchy from end to end of Ireland; and all, you know, because the Lords dared to oppose the will of the people. Why," he used to add, to some kindred spirit at the National Liberal Club, "it will give us such a chance of destroying 'em as we mayn't get again."

With those patriotic and statesmanlike views, we can but faintly picture to ourselves the incredulous fury of Giles when he began to realise that perhaps, after all, the Bill might not pass the Commons. It is true that Liberal Governments have been defeated before now, but never such a Government. It differed from all other Governments in the almost divine attributes assumed by its leader; and to vote against him (whatever he, in his wisdom, might suggest) ceased to be a blunder, and became an impious and unpardonable crime.

And yet there were many Liberals who, at last being driven to bay, were determined to commit

this crime, and resist the Bill to the death. Unlike Lord St Kevan, they did not consider that resistance to such a measure and such a Minister was inconsistent with their allegiance to their party, especially when such resistance involved the maintenance of that party's traditional principles.

Indeed, should we be in a sanguine mood, it is not difficult to conceive that all the more independent, patriotic, and statesmanlike Liberals would combine to oppose a Bill which, if passed, would infallibly pave the way for the ruin both of the country that was to capitulate and the country that was to be made victorious.

Let us do Mr Cade the justice to suppose that even he drew back, and, throwing his leader over, appeared as one of the champions of the Union. We may readily believe that he found the vague hopes he had sometimes held out looked very different when introduced by the Prime Minister in the distorted and concrete form of this Bill.

We should also remember that Mr Cade was still a comparatively young man. In ten years' time, when the irreparable evil of the Bill (if it

passed) had made itself manifest, he would probably have become, had he supported it, a useful victim on whom the wrath of the enraged and disillusioned democracy might be poured.

If, then, we conclude that Mr Cade resisted the measure, we may be sure that the caucuses—*his* caucuses—were not slow to resent his honesty and independence.

They naturally proclaimed him a turncoat and a traitor ("Judas," I think, was the favourite word), because he had been both unchanging and consistent in his conduct,—because, in reality, he had refused to become a turncoat and a traitor to please the whim of a leader who had succeeded in becoming both. Mr Giles brought a "little pressure" to bear upon him, and determined that, as a punishment, he should be the recipient of a squeeze from his own machinery. But the reader by this time will have learnt that Mr Cade was not a man to be crushed; and so (if all this were really to have happened) we may be quite sure that he was more than a match for his enemies.

In addition we may be sure—or rather the more malignant and Conservative of us (we are told that

the two qualities generally go together) will be prepared to believe—that no trick, however dubious or dirty, was left untried in order to entrap or coerce the independent minority; that every form of force and fraud which Mr Giles and the caucus could suggest was employed; that the Prime Minister's malign dexterity of dubious phrase was flourished with even more than customary cunning; that he explained his explanations, and then again explained their explanation, with increasing mystery and decreasing information; that parts of the Bill, declared inalienable and vital, were dropped and then replaced; completely contradictory promises were made and broken; and finally, that the party seem to have been promised, or understood that they were promised to a certain undefined extent, that if only they would pass the Bill, so as to keep the Government in office, as a reward the very Bill itself should be abandoned, and they would only find themselves pledged to nothing worse than an abstract resolution.

And we may still be reluctantly forced to believe that such conduct was possible under the circumstances, even if the Liberal press were to treat

the prophecy as one born of Tory lies and calumnies; because it will be generally found that if any foreseeing but indiscreet Conservative ever suggests that under certain given circumstances the Premier will take a (let us say) *characteristic* course of action, the Liberal press cry out against the libel, indignantly deny it, and finally boast that they have killed that Tory calumny. Then, the given circumstances arising, it turns out after all that the peculiarly *characteristic* course *is* taken; and the principles of honesty and honour are once more readjusted to suit the Premier's momentary convenience.

It is time to end our little fiction, however; and it can have but one conclusion. Of course the only supposition possible for any of us who are Englishmen is, that the Bill was thrown out. That event, at any rate, will not be challenged by even the fiercest of Radicals; we all must acknowledge that no British Parliament *could* do otherwise. We know that such a Bill would be thrown out—thrown out in spite of every dodge that a Premier and his mechanisms could perpetrate; in spite of irritable and inconsequent letters he might hurl against all his old friends and colleagues who dared to commit

the unpardonable crime of disagreement; in spite of wild appeals to ignorance and prejudice to show at last their real strength and overpower all education, enlightenment, and common-sense; in spite of a manifesto from a "working man M.P." (even he had been corrupted by "the classes," for he had at last conventionalised his spelling until it was undistinguishable from theirs, instead of being stamped with the freedom and independence of that of a son of the soil), couched in words so long and language so grandiloquent, that it was almost incomprehensible to the educated classes—presumably, therefore, not so much intended to convey a meaning to the men to whom it was addressed, as to fill them with a vague awe, and cow them by the sacred sanction of unintelligible mystery; in spite of a real Home Rule meeting at Exeter Hall, presided over by a cynical humourist, and addressed by a "captain" in the Salvation Army, two working men M.P.'s, an honest and industrious plumber, a footman (out of place), and other authorities on the subject. It would be thrown out not only in spite of this "glorious meeting," but in spite of the meeting's resolution to the effect that "This meeting accords its heartiest

sympathy and warmest support to the Prime Minister, as it believes that any measure he may introduce for the future government of Ireland, or any modifications he may see fit to make in such a measure, will guarantee the future peace and prosperity of that country, and prove a final solution of the Irish question." Finally, even in spite of similar resolutions being passed by the Cowes Liberal Three Hundred, the Highgate Home Rule Association, the Wellington Radical Brotherhood, the Imperial Disintegration Society, the Crown and Peers' Liberation Society, the Banbury Junior Liberal Club, the Colonial Emancipation Society, the Young Women's Advancement Association, and many others.

The Bill was thrown out, but Mr Giles did not feel himself beaten. He made up his mind to a dissolution, and determined to assist the Prime Minister in appealing to the worst passions of the mob under the taking names of Justice, Love, and Conciliation. "If after that," he said, "England should happen to disapprove of us and of our policy — why, so much the worse for England. We shall have to teach her a lesson, and a pretty

sharp one too. At any rate, we'll make any other Government but ours impossible." And perhaps it will not be a surprise to any one who has read thus far, when he hears that the intentions of our (happily fictitious) Premier were not very different from those of Mr Giles.

The dissolution took place. Now was the moment for Claud to stand for his Division of the county. Instead of dawdling at Pompeii, he ought to have been hard at work among the voters, educating the agricultural mind to a sense of its manifest duty, and the awful responsibility that rested on its decision. It is true that this education was most satisfactorily accomplished in his absence—perhaps even more effectually than if he had been present—by a series of comfortable and convincing placards, which displayed in enticing colours the royal standard of England as it is at present, and the royal standard of the future with the Irish corner and its harp completely blotted out. The agricultural mind, even if it could not read, was possessed of a sufficient sense of symmetry and proportion to at once feel that there must be something wrong in this, and for the first time had

doubts concerning the wisdom of the obliterating policy. When the district was further placarded with realistic pictures of the Prime Minister pulling down the Union-jack, it gradually became convinced that it could not support any measure of Home Rule for Ireland. But where was Claud, that placards had to take his place, instead of supplementing his endeavours?

He was still at Pompeii: he was not well, and every day he seemed to be becoming worse. After the happiest moment of his life, when he had held his darling in his arms amid the blaze of undreamt-of joy that sudden possession lit for him, the two had wandered back together — probably hand in hand, they did not know or care — and had gone straight to Mrs Denbigh for her blessing. In the evening, Claud had not felt at all well, and next morning, after an almost sleepless night, he had become quite ill. The doctor was not sure whether he was sickening for typhoid; and the long day wore on, only brightened by visits from Claudia and Darlington.

The announcement of the dissolution had come that very morning, together with a letter from

Lord St Kevan, asking Claud to return in order to attend to his election, and requesting that his address might be sent by return of post if possible.

Poor Claud sat up in bed. He was ill, and was becoming worse every moment. Already he felt as though his head were bursting; he felt his body strangely light, yet sinking, like a feather fluttering down a bottomless abyss.

"Claudia," he said, turning his head so that his eyes might rest on her in one continuous and satisfying look, "I must dictate this address somehow or other—if you will be so good as to write it down."

She got pen and paper. He dictated quickly—at times with that almost breathless fervour which fever gives. At last he lay back exhausted, closing his eyes, but the address was finished. It was as follows:—

"GENTLEMEN,—I take this opportunity of thanking you for the honour you have done me, in asking me to offer myself as a candidate for the representation of your Division of the county.

"Believing, as I do, that the great factors of all

political, moral, and social progress may be summed up in the two words *duty* and *moral courage*,—duty to do what we believe to be right, and what we also believe will be for the true welfare of our country, in spite even of unpopularity, and irrespective of the consequences to ourselves; moral courage to face the probable results of our acts, and to resist, if necessary, the constantly fluctuating tides of average opinion,—I shall feel it my duty to oppose with all my might the present Government, who, instead of being faithful to the great traditional principles of their party, have put off till to-morrow what should have been done to-day; have tried to shirk instead of recognising their responsibilities, until they have plunged us into the unspeakable shame of a betrayal of those who trusted us, and the deliberate sacrifice of England's noblest son; and finally, have sought to weaken and destroy, with the hope of snatching a party victory, not only all our constitutional safeguards, but even our constitution itself.

"A party can only end in failure and disgrace which, while in Opposition, tries to thwart and

neutralise the foreign policy of her Majesty's Government, substituting for it, when in power, a policy in which weakness takes the place of consistency, and vacillation that of logical clearness; which bribes the agricultural labourer with promises which it knows can never be fulfilled; which sets class against class, threatens the security of capital, and finally joins in a conspiracy with the avowed enemies of England—'men marching through rapine to the dismemberment of the empire'—with the hope of destroying the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament and the integrity of the United Kingdom.

"I need not here denounce Home Rule. You will find it denounced in far stronger language than I can employ if you will refer to the various speeches and addresses of the Liberal candidates during the last election. That many of these gentlemen are at the present moment advocating such a measure at the dictation of a Premier who has purchased the Irish vote and office at the price of his country's betrayal, is but another proof that these gentlemen are not only prepared to sacrifice their strongest principles, but are also prepared to sacrifice the

loyalists of Ireland, the true welfare of that country, the supremacy of the United Kingdom, and every tie of honesty and honour, if only by so doing they can obtain a brief and shameless spell of power. 'A great country deserts its subjects either because it has been crushed beyond hope in the field of battle, or because it has ceased to be a great country and is travelling fast down the road of national decay.'

"On you and on your fellow-electors depends the momentous decision whether our country shall fall beneath the heel of 'the most powerful, unscrupulous, and destructive demagogue who ever appeared in British public life'; or whether it shall emancipate itself from its thraldom, and once more rise up —feared by the wicked and trusted by the good— doing justice to all alike with the same brave determination, yielding neither to foreign foes nor to domestic traitors, and earning once again the admiration and respect of all right-thinking men. I believe that the good cause will triumph. But if it is not to be lost in irredeemable disgrace, each one of us must put aside our party ties, our personal considerations, and join with those who are

now loyally fighting for their country's honour, its united Government, and even, it may be, for its very future existence.

"'Sharers of our glorious past,
Brothers, must we part at last?
Shall not we through good and ill
Cleave to one another still?
Britain's myriad voices call
"Sons, be welded, each and all,
Into one Imperial whole,
One with Britain heart and soul!
One life, one flag, one fleet, one throne!"
Britons, hold your own!
And God guard all!'

—I have the honour to remain, &c.,

"CLAUD BROWNLOW."

"Isn't it just a little long?" said Claudia, when he had finished his dictation, and was lying back exhausted with the effort.

"Isn't it rather too much of a sermon?" asked Claud in reply.

"Oh, I think the principles are beautiful."

"My dear child," said Claud, with the ghost of his ready smile crossing his face, "it's so easy to express beautiful principles—the great difficulty is

to carry them out in practice. However," he continued, with a little weary tone, "you had better let it go as it is; my uncle will cut it down and revise it if it isn't expressed in the orthodox way. Among the Whig families, you know, there is a particular style for their election addresses—just as there is a particular style for the Queen's speech—and I am afraid I have not inherited it."

"I wonder what Lord Darlington will say in his address."

"Darlington! Yes; what fun it would be if one could only see his efforts to make it up! My dear chap," he said, turning his head towards Darlington, who had entered at this moment, "what are you going to say in your address?"

"I really don't know," replied Darlington serenely, taking a chair as he spoke, and looking at Claud with his blue eyes filled with a real concern when he saw how ill he was looking.

"Let us make one up for you then," put in Claudia, mischievously.

"I am anxious to restore to the Irish their just rights, and to ensure their future peace and prosperity, by releasing them from the shameful tyranny

of a foreign Government, thus enabling them for the future to manage their own affairs by a judiciously controlled Legislative Assembly in Dublin," said Claud in a demure voice, as though he were reading the address.

"I am also anxious that every agricultural labourer, instead of precariously subsisting on daily wages, should be able to gain a competency by the cultivation of his own allotment; and it therefore will give me the greatest pleasure to offer portions of my father's property at a nominal price to any labourers anxious to possess them, in order that my aspirations for their benefit may have a practical fulfilment," added Claudia, laughing.

Darlington got up and went to the window, for he did not like to be chaffed on such a solemn subject as his election address.

"My father is writing my address," he said, with his small consequential air of importance.

"But what are you going to say in your speeches?" persisted Claud.

"I don't know." Then he turned round with the air of one who is going to make a point. "You may be sure, whatever I say," he broke in with a

tone of triumph, "I shall pitch into the Tories well. I'm going to give it 'em hot."

"My dear boy, spare us!" cried Claud from his bed.

"What about Home Rule?" asked Claudia.

"We are not supporting Home Rule; we are going in for a large and comprehensive scheme of local self-government," replied Darlington with dignity.

"And what, pray, is that?" asked Claud.

"Well, my dear chap, I daresay it's much the same thing," said Darlington, coming back to his chair in his restless way, and stroking Claud's hand with a little appealing gesture, which seemed to imply that Claud was aware he knew nothing about it, and that therefore it was very unkind to put him through this catechism.

"Well, try not to ruin the country," said Claud.

Then Darlington uttered one of his few recorded epigrams. "There can be no fear of our ruining the country," he said, "while Redburn is upholding the Constitution by blacking his face and singing nigger songs at Primrose League teas. Of course we can't leave our party; and so we must abuse

the Conservatives," he added. "The governor says that the Premier can't last long; and then the Whigs will regain their proper influence and position. Besides, the governor's sure of the Buckhounds in the next Government; and think what a lark that'll be! I know my mother is longing to overhaul the enclosure list for Ascot."

"Put my name down, and I forgive you," laughed Claud, as Darlington went off to see about his play. "He's a dear chap," said Claud, as he caught an echo in Claudia's eyes. "But fancy him in Parliament! And yet I daresay he'll make a very good member. Men like Darlington generally go with their party—chiefly, I think, from thoughtlessness. But if they really believe that anything is dishonourable or dishonest, they are perfectly firm; nothing will make them yield. And after all, if one considers the members of Parliament individually, one sometimes really can hardly understand how we are governed at all."

Claud ceased speaking, and lay with his eyes closed: he was very tired with all his exertions, and the fever was becoming higher as the afternoon wore on. Claudia read to him through the slow

hours that passed, and were recorded only by one long thin patch of sunshine, which glided in between the blind and window, and crept across the farther wall with almost imperceptible deliberation.

When we are seized by illness, or by a sudden trouble, we long to have our thoughts taken away from self. We are seized by a wistful desire that our wandering fancies may be captured by some strong knight-errant of romance. The affairs of every day and their accompanying literature, which we find almost unavoidable in health and activity, now seem suddenly to have become so trivial, so ephemeral, so terribly unsatisfying in their smart barren artificiality; and we turn with a sudden longing—almost home-sickness—to some once loved, now almost forgotten book, which we used to know so well and ponder over so lovingly in the old days long ago. Claud had bethought him of those three brave novels which come to us, whether in health or sickness, with renewed and never-wearied satisfaction, with a breezy air of buoyant healthfulness, and almost with the epic force and freshness of the 'Odyssey.' They are so full of manliness and truth, of chivalrous honesty,

generous honour, and wholesome ever-varying adventure, that they brace the mind like sea-winds blowing over moorlands, and in so doing seem even to help the suffering body to regain its tone. Claud had asked for 'Westward Ho!' or 'Lorna Doone,' or 'Esmond'; and Claudia had found the latter in the library. She was now reading it aloud. Chapter after chapter began and finished; the quiet story pursued its gentle course, as soothing as the sound of a slow river that murmurs on for ever over its glistening bed.

They read through Harry's earliest childhood with the old Huguenot; the long, long ride; the first brief interview between my lady and her little page; the mystery of Father Holt's nocturnal doings, which broke into the quiet days at Castlewood; the capture of my lady, the honest kindness of Dick Steel, and then the coming of "the new protectors."

Claudia's voice was singularly low and sweet. Sometimes she paused, and she and Claud would exchange a few remarks suggested by the story. Claud admitted that Esmond was a splendid fellow, but he pleaded that he always kept the warmest corner of his heart for young Castlewood.

Claudia, woman-like, spent all her store of admiration on the hero. She thought young Castlewood was selfish, thoughtless, vain, and very empty-headed.

"He was, he was," said Claud; "but still he was charming for all that."

They had even greater differences over Beatrix. Claud thought her perhaps the most brilliant and fascinating heroine of all romance; and when he was reminded of her faults, felt inclined to exclaim that she with her faults was finer than other women with all their virtues. This, of course, Claudia could not allow. If Beatrix was more gifted and more beautiful than other women, she said, the wrong was the greater if she was unworthy of those gifts, and if she allowed herself to be untrue to her highest self. She was even more selfish and heartless than her brother. She was beautiful but bad,—a terrible warning against unrestrained ambition.

The discussion was only interrupted by the doctor's evening visit. He found Claud worse, and ordered him absolute quiet. A nurse had been sent for; she would arrive soon to stay with him

through the night. The illness was declared to be typhoid, and he gave Claud his first large dose of quinine. It was so large that it would probably act as a narcotic, and might even perhaps render him partially insensible.

"You may stay till the nurse comes, and then you must leave for the night; but you may see our patient again in the morning," the doctor said kindly, before he went away.

The sun was setting. It filled the room (for the blind had been lifted) with rosy light, which to Claud, with his flying pulse and his restless fancies, seemed fired by a hot unearthly glare, in ghastly accord with the fever that grappled him. They had ceased talking now; they only held hands, and Claudia bathed his forehead at times with eau-de-Cologne. So the sun sank down, and the shadow of evening passed over these two young lovers, sitting on silently, waiting, they cared not for what; who felt that each was all in all to the other, and that, come what might, while a smile of love could be given or a dumb caress received, there were depths of happiness still in the world, unfathomed and unsuspected by any beside themselves.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE doctor, when he came next day, found that Claud was very ill. The fever had completely mastered him. He was not delirious, but he was still in a drowsy, half-conscious state from the effects of the quinine. The room was darkened and very still. Claud's rapid breathing and the ticking of his small railway clock were the only sounds which caught the ear. Claudia sat quite still and silent by the bed, and the doctor gave her leave to remain there, if she would help to keep the patient quiet. She read to him through all the morning, but in his torpid state he could not follow the thread of the story, or even gather what was passing; only the dear voice soothed him, and the gallant, graceless, loyal, swaggering life of the olden times seemed to entwine itself with his dreams.

During the night he had dreamt much and vividly. He thought he was once more back at Harrow, in those distant days which seem to us so long ago, when we still were small boys in "Eton collars." He was sitting in a class-room doing arithmetic; the drowsy afternoon crept by so slowly, it might have been endless. The sums went on and on, and would not finish. A maze, a haze of figures covered his paper; in vain he sought for his mistakes—he could not find them.

Then he was lying in his flannels on the warm short grass. There was a cricket-match; his side were in, and they were making a capital score. His head was resting on the captain's outstretched back; from such a comfortable pillow he could watch the players making their runs, and wait his turn for "going in" with lazy acquiescence.

The hot, cloudless afternoon, which shone with an almost blinding brightness, through the cool tent's mouth, and which seemed so quiet, in spite of the bracing sound of the batting, and the recurrent calls of "Over," gave him an indescribable sense of languid delight. How strangely happy he was as he sat once again in the midst of his light-hearted

schoolboy comrades, and once more watched for the moment when the field would be waiting for him "to go in" (as he used to go in, in those happy far-off days) to play his very best for the honour of his side and the victory of his dear old school! Next he dreamt he was lying at length in a boat, in some quiet backwater near Oxford. The sky was grey and overcast. Dark clouds massed themselves behind the shivering poplars, and the willow pollards bent their branches in obedience to the gusts of gathering wind that came at intervals with such chilly inhospitality, and whispered so mournfully among the trembling rushes. A hawthorn-hedge ran down towards the water; it terminated in a hurdle, through whose bars the distant city looked grey and almost ghostlike. The boat was fastened to a wild rose-tree, and was sheltered by the overhanging bank, crowned with a tangle of wet weeds and long grasses, and a little worn along its edges by the feet of the evening bathers.

He lay down in the bottom of his boat, and wondered vaguely why he could not rise and scull himself back to Oxford, where warmth, and friends, and tea were waiting for him in his snug oak-panelled

rooms that always grew even more home-like than usual, when lit by the cosy light of the flickering fire. Again his fancies changed with the mood of the fever that throbbed through his dreams softly, but with a gentle persistence,—as the sound of a distant thrashing-machine comes over the autumn fields with a dull continuous hum, and makes itself felt through all the lighter sounds that surround us. He dreamt he was floating along a river: in the boat were several others—men he had known and cared for at Oxford; and a soothing sense of their old affection—their friendly protection—came over him. The man in the stern had a banjo, and faintly hummed a song as the boat floated on. The dying sunset still flushed the sky behind them, and they left a rosy wake away to the fading daylight; but a thin blue mist was rising, and it stretched itself out in long obliterating lines of ghostly white. It seemed to him as though life itself were sinking away, following in the footsteps of the forsaking sun, and that he was swiftly drifting into another world of darkness and strange forgetfulness and gathering death. He murmured to himself some half-forgotten lines he had picked

up somewhere, and now recollected almost by chance:—

"Dropping down the river,
'Midst the summer even,
Whilst the winds are heavy
With the blossom odours,
Whilst the birds are singing
In their sleepless nests.
Musical the rippling
Of the tardy current;
Musical the murmur
Of the wind-swept trees;
Musical the cadence
Of the friendly voices,
Laden with the sweetness
Of the songs of old."

"What is it, dear?" asked Claudia, bending over him to try and catch his murmured words.

"I have been dreaming," answered Claud, waking up slowly from his long night's trance—"dreaming of the old times at Harrow and Oxford." He was quite awake now. The doctor came, and found the fever still so high that he ordered him to take ice-baths. Before he had the first one, however, Mrs Denbigh came in to see him. She was only allowed to stay a few moments, it being most important that he should be kept perfectly quiet.

She held his hand, and as she stroked his hair off his forehead she expressed to him all the concern and anxiety she was feeling on his account; and then she added, with a sudden maternal sweetness which greatly touched him, that for the future he must look upon her as his mother. He could only thank her by a look and a squeeze of the hand. Words are so often inadequate to express all our gratitude for an unexpected kindness, a revelation of unsuspected love. "You are too good," he murmured, and kissed her hand. Mrs Denbigh rose up to go, but just as she reached the door Darlington burst in without invitation, or even permission to enter, with his flushed and smiling face looking still more radiantly boyish than usual.

"Really, Lord Darlington, is this the way you enter a sick-room?" said Mrs Denbigh, severely.

Darlington did not heed her. "Yes—I mean no," was all the answer he offered her as he turned to Claud, sat on the bed, pushed back his hat from his heated forehead, and poured into Claud's attentive ears an account of the play, and another piece of news which was even more exciting.

. . . . . .

The entertainment had proved a great success. Even the foreigners had been amused by the nigger minstrels, and the English of course had been charmed; for we know that they always find in niggers a perennial source of delight. The great comic song—

> "I've stuck between the railings of the arey,
> In trying to kiss cookey on the chin,"

was twice encored. And if the foreigners were especially charmed by "Hard Times" and some of the more serious of the songs, it was probably because they did not understand English sufficiently well to fully appreciate our characteristic forms of humour. The music-hall entertainment also gave unbounded delight—to the English. But here again the foreigners could not follow the delicate turns of wit, the hinted humour, the perfect tact, and the exquisite *finesse* which are characteristic of these entertainments, and which appeal so strongly and render them so irresistible to the English nation, whenever it contrives to witness one of them.

Tottie's song, for instance, was such a tremend-

ous success, that the author cannot resist the temptation of quoting its chorus. He came on dressed as "a music-hall young lady," in pink silk stockings, short skirts, a painted face, and a very golden wig; and he sang his song with such gusto and effect, that the author also feels that he really must apologise if in the previous pages of this book he has given the impression that poor little Tottie was hopelessly stupid. If he has done so, he has failed to do Tottie justice, for that young gentleman proved himself to be nothing of the sort when he gave up his mind to imitating "the lady star *artistes*" of that distinguished profession.

And these are the words whose brilliant delivery convinced even the most sceptical that Tottie had brains (of a certain sort), and at times knew how to use them:—

"I'm a mashing, dashing, little gay coquette—get away.
And I smoke the lardy-dardy cigarette—get away.
But I really am so shy,
That I cannot tell you why,
I'm your own rummy, nummy, crummy pet—get away."

He sniggled, he ogled, he tittered, he winked,

he danced, and he sang. All his friends were in raptures. "He's the most amusing chap I ever met" was the general verdict, although it must be admitted there were some (for we know there are always jealous natures who hate that another should be nobler or better or more successful than themselves) who said, "Little ass! He makes one sick. Why doesn't somebody kick him?"

When Tottie's *encores* were finally over, and he had gathered up his last bouquet, there came a piano sketch, which was given by a gentleman, "in the style of Corney Grain." It only recalled the faintest recollections of the great original, although it was not only given in his style, but was even given—as far as possible—in his own music, his songs, and his language.

This was followed by an operetta in French, and the whole entertainment wound up with the little comedietta which was played by Miss van Knut and Darlington.

Darlington was very nervous, but he got through the opening all right, when he has to come downstairs and find that the family prayers have begun. Then Lucy entered, and the conversational *badinage*

began in grim earnest, until they neared the fatal passage.

"Is it yes or no?" whispered Darlington, suddenly; but Miss van Knut took no notice, and went on with her part.

"Now will you marry me?" said Darlington suddenly, in what was intended to be a whisper, but which had an intensity and emphasis in it that would probably carry it farther than was desired.

Lucy at this point was supposed to be sobbing. "You don't consider my feelings, it seems," she sobbed; then she suddenly turned her head towards him and whispered, "Yes; go on with your part." But if she expected that he would go on with his part, she was wofully mistaken. He caught at her hand. "You're a brick!" he said, with a triumphant air of delight. Then he suddenly recalled the situation. He had forgotten every word, and blushing turned to the prompter.

"You shall not miss——" said the voice of that indispensable functionary.

"Oh yes—of course. You shall not miss them while I am by. You shall listen to mine—for I

love you," he said in one burst, and went down on his knees with a thump which made every one titter.

Miss van Knut gave out her next speech with the utmost coolness and deliberation—she even put in a piece of *impromptu* by-play, and suddenly chucked her young lover under the chin.

He had recovered himself by this time, so with an air of portentous gravity he rose up, and taking her face between his hands, he began the famous speech in his most tragical tones.

"O child, child!" he began; but whether his sense of the ludicrous overmastered him, or whether the demureness of Miss van Knut's expression was too irresistible, or whether the excitement of happiness had taken away his nerve,—he never himself knew, but he suddenly burst out laughing, and dropped her face as though it had been a hot plate that he was handling. She only controlled her expression a moment longer than he did.

"You are really too funny for anything," she said through her laughter, regaining her presence of mind sufficiently to throw open the door in

the background. "We also have been at family prayers," she went on. "Doesn't he look like it?" she suddenly added as the curtain fell.

Although the audience could not be certain how much was *impromptu* and how much was in the play, they knew by instinct that it was not all acting, and that some crisis must have taken place in the relationship of these two young people to each other. The conclusion of the play became the event of the evening, and gave a universal topic for conversation. Lady Downstreamdown swept round behind the scenes and commanded Darlington to appear before her. When he did appear she carried him off to her rooms, and what happened during the subsequent interview never transpired. At the end of an hour Miss van Knut was sent for, and was received extremely graciously.

"So after all you were only testing his constancy?" said the Countess, kissing her.

"Oh dear, no; I was testing my own," answered Miss van Knut. "Lord Darlington has the most lovely character," she added.

"He's only a boy," suggested his mother.

"I guess I like a nice boy better than a one-

horse man." Then she suddenly seized the Countess's hand and said, "You are not angry with us, are you? I hope I shall make him a good wife. Ah, but how hard I shall try!"

"My dear," said the Countess, her dignity gradually thawing into geniality, "I am sure you will succeed. And I think that Darlington could not have shown his good sense better than by choosing you."

"And I may come to England and canvass for him? I am longing to canvass—it must be real fun; and you know we Americans canvass quite too beautifully when we set about it."

"Of course," said the Countess. "I hope you will come and stay with us at once. We shall be starting to-morrow, I think. Darlington has to see about his election, and I am sure this place is most unhealthy. They have had several cases of typhoid, I hear, besides poor Mr Brownlow. So sad, I think, a young man struck down like that, and not at all likely to recover, they say."

"Not recover!" exclaimed Miss van Knut in a tone of distress, and she turned to Darlington, who at this moment sauntered into the room and asserted

his new possession by putting his arm round her waist.

"Is Mr Brownlow really dangerously ill?" she asked.

"Not a bit," answered Darlington, in his easy way. "Old Claud will pull through all right,—why, he's standing for Parliament!"

"It's too funny to think of you in Parliament, darling—ton," said Miss van Knut, in that voice which unconsciously marks the change from a sad subject concerning some one else, to a delightful one with which we ourselves are occupied. "And I'm coming to canvass for you — it will be too lovely!"

"Quite too lovely," said Darlington, kissing her. And they separated for the night.

As the days went on, Pompeii became almost deserted. The English season had taken most of the English home, and many of the foreigners had left in consequence of the spread of the fever. There had been a good many cases during the last fortnight, and it had been discovered that poor Pompeii was practically undrained. The long deserted streets, with their brightly painted little houses,

could not help looking in the burning sunshine as though they formed the pathetic framework of some dumb forgotten city of other days. The white dust lay along their pavements. The Forum stood in all its graceful beauty: it was neglected and silent. Its very loneliness made a mute appeal for some returning life—some sound of voices or movement of people—to break the stillness. Mrs Leo had recovered, and she and her husband had gone to Sienna. Lady Downstreamdown and Darlington had returned to England for the election, and the Van Knuts had gone with them. Mr Smythe had returned to godfather the various London dances. Tottie had flown. The very word fever was enough to send him flying; for he would at any time have left his dearest friend to die anywhere, deserted and alone, rather than stay near anything that he imagined might be infectious. Even Miss Rattletubs had departed. She had had a great loss. All her letters to her brother, which had been especially written with a view to subsequent publication, had been lost, and she was hurrying home to try to see if they could not be found again. She also intended to speak in favour of Home Rule at some of the

meetings. "Of course we must abolish the Union —I've always said so," she told her friends. "I've always said that it was the Union which produced the Irish famine, and the Fenians, and the Land League, and all their troubles. If we can only abolish it, I feel certain that Ireland will be as contented and happy and prosperous as it was before they were crushed down by that infamous act of oppression. Besides, the dear Prime Minister wishes it—and that's enough for me; because how could he possibly wish it if it wasn't right? We are going to rule them by love instead of by law for the future: it will make a splendid beginning, for that is what I am looking forward to—the whole world governed by love,—no kings, no armies, no policemen even, nothing but the sense of unselfish justice which will be all-powerful." Which sentiments show that Miss Rattletubs had not been corrupted by Pompeii, but retained her sturdy common-sense and her independence of judgment through every danger that might surround her.

All our friends had gone: the languid and beautiful Bertie had joined his regiment at Windsor; Redburn had left to arrange his show at Dowdes-

wells before going out with his yeomanry; Lady Marlowe was fighting the battle of the Constitution with Primrose teas in the country,—only Mrs Denbigh and Claudia remained to nurse poor Claud.

Day after day passed on, and the fever ran its course. He generally dozed for about twenty-four hours after his doses of quinine, and then woke up only to find that the time for his ice-baths had arrived.

He grew gradually weaker, and Lord St Kevan was sent for. He was almost too ill to be read to now. He lay for hours with Claudia sitting by his side; his hand rested in hers, and in spite of his weakness, a deep unspoken happiness gave his mind leisure for repose. He felt devoid of all anxiety or even curiosity about the future. His body was so strangely inert—so uncontrollable by any wish of his—that he sometimes felt inclined to wonder if it were really his own. And his mind shared to a certain extent in the strange experience.

So the slow hot days passed on, till one morning a letter came—a letter whose very envelope made Claudia's eyes dance with a sudden brightness.

"Look here!" she said, holding it out at arm's length. "Claud, look at the address!"

He did so, and caught for a moment her smile and her look of hot delighted excitement as he read, "Claud Brownlow, Esq., M.P."

"Claud Brownlow, M.P.," he repeated slowly, but the smile had died away out of his eyes and lips. "Please put it," he said, "somewhere where I can see it." It was pinned to the foot of the bed. He looked at it for a long time without speaking. Then he said suddenly, "It is so exciting—the first time,"—he turned his head and looked into his darling's eyes before he added,—"and perhaps the last time too."

"The last time, Claud!"

"Yes; for they will require to have another election."

CHAPTER XXIII.

LORD ST KEVAN arrived the morning after his letter. He was in great distress at his nephew's illness; Claud had always lain very near his heart. He had always loved him with a love which was almost paternal in its tenderness; he had thought of him first; he had looked on him as his personal heir, although, of course, all the real property went to his elder nephew.

He had watched him growing from childhood, and had tried to enter into all his interests and sympathise with all his boyish troubles. If of late some clouds had gathered between them, they had since departed, having taught both, the uncle hoped, a lesson of forgiveness for unintentioned errors, and given them for the future a new experience of mutual sympathy, of charity, and of forbearance.

And now, when the consummation of all his fondest hopes had been crowned by Claud's election, the blow had suddenly fallen; every plan which he had formed lay shattered; the nephew whom he loved so dearly was very ill, it might be dying. As he lay there, so weak, so quiet, so pathetically content, his poor head resting on the rumpled pillow, the smile of welcome lingering so wistfully on his boyish face, his uncle suddenly realised what it would cost him if this young life were taken; and all the troubles of later years seemed in a moment to be visible as an encircling web, woven by the mysterious Fates into an inauspicious garment of inevitable doom.

He stood for a second silent, thinking of another bedside, when his younger brother, Claud's father, had pressed his hand for the last time, and smiled at him so lovingly with the same eyes that were smiling at him now. Then he said gently—

"My poor boy, it is terrible to see you like this. We must try to get you well as soon as possible. We owe it to the country, for you are a public character now, you know."

"You are too good; I can never thank you. I

am so sorry you should have had the bother of coming all this way for me," said Claud.

He was very weak, and he spoke with difficulty; but this was one of the days when he had not to take quinine, and his mind was clear although his voice was low. He turned his head and looked at both Claudia and his uncle with a sudden flush of expectancy.

"My—Claudia," he said, simply.

She was standing on the other side of the bed. Lord St Kevan came up to her, and bending over her, gave her a quiet kiss, with that grand air of mingled paternal and chivalrous courtesy which only comes with a rich inheritance of stainless nature nobly trained.

"My dear, will you accept an old man's blessing?" he said, taking her hand very kindly; "believe me, it is the best gift he has to offer. In spite of his illness, Claud ought to be one of the happiest men living," he added, gallantly.

"I am—I am," said Claud.

"If anything can atone for my delay in offering my congratulations to my nephew, it must be the warmth with which I offer them, now

that I have the pleasure of knowing the young lady."

He gave the quaint, ceremonious little sentences with his charming old-world grace of bearing, and Claudia thought him the most distinguished type of perfect courtliness that she had ever seen.

She felt confused as she tried to thank him for his kindness — to express her earnest hope that she might succeed in being the best of wives to the best of men.

"You must stop her mouth, uncle, when she talks like that," Claud said, before he asked eagerly if Darlington had been elected. When he heard that not only Darlington had been elected, but that Flashington had been defeated, he could have cheered with delight, and felt that comfortable sense of satisfaction which follows any great relief take complete possession of him.

Lord St Kevan sat down, and drawing a local newspaper from his pocket, offered to read them Darlington's speech. They were naturally delighted. Claud had long had a great curiosity to know what Darlington would say when fate should bring him face to face with a confronting meeting,

and he should find himself at last really compelled to make a speech—or something that would pass for one.

"First of all, I must read you a letter which the Prime Minister has been kind enough to honour his opponent with," Lord St Kevan said, softly. "It is a very characteristic one. Here it is." He found the paragraph, and began—

"DEAR SIR,—Having spent some days during my childhood in your neighbourhood, I trust I shall not be accused of attempting to unduly influence your election if I write to tell you what an especial and peculiar interest I take in your contest.

"As all right, all justice, and all expediency are on your side, while your opponent (who, I much regret to see, is standing in support of that infamous Union, which I have so consistently condemned throughout my political career) can only be supported by the narrow prejudice of the educated classes and their dependants, I earnestly trust that you may be successful in your noble battle against privilege and error. I am as certain that we (supported as we are by the convinced and

righteous judgment of the impartial masses) must win in the end, as I am certain that truth and honour, justice, right, and honesty, will finally prevail. When the sons of peers, as I observe with deep regret, not only take part in elections, but even offer themselves as candidates for Parliament, with the purpose of representing the aristocratic orders in the House of Commons, I gravely fear that they strike another blow at the aristocracy and at the constitution of our country. Should they succeed in their endeavours, the doubt will be reluctantly forced upon me whether, at no long time from the present, it may not be necessary to protect the country against their pernicious and encroaching influence."

"Very pretty, I'm sure," said Claud.

"We must make allowances," replied Lord St Kevan. "At any rate, it did Darlington good rather than harm, I believe."

Then he turned to the paper and read them Darlington's speech. It was so much more conventional than could possibly have been expected, that they all decided that either the newspaper

must have somewhat rearranged it for their readers, or that Darlington's papa had had a hand in its composition. Claudia inquired if he was not asked any questions. Lord St Kevan at this suggestion looked on a little, and found the report of some interrogations at the bottom of the column. "He is asked what are his views with regard to local government, and this is his answer," he said—"'Any scheme for enlarging the representative principle in local self-government will receive my most careful consideration, and should it prove to be sufficiently comprehensive, I shall hope to accord it my warmest support.'"

Claud laughed aloud. It was the first time he had laughed since his illness. "Fancy poor old Darlington actually saying that! How I should like to have seen his face when he read it off a slip of paper!"

"Hush, Claud! you mustn't talk so much, you will make yourself worse," said Claudia, in a warning voice.

"Yes, yes, of course; how inconsiderate I am!" added Lord St Kevan hastily, recollecting that they were in charge of their invalid, and were responsible for his being kept perfectly quiet. "You

must listen, my boy, while we talk. Let me tell you about Cade. He has behaved splendidly—splendidly. 'Pon my sou., . didn't know he had it in him. He and Grimley and Featherstonhaw, and the others, have fought for the principles of their party and the integrity of the empire like Crusaders. I'm almost sorry I left them all — I am indeed." A glow of enthusiasm shone in the old man's eyes, and his companions felt the appealing tremble of indignant sympathy ring through his gentle expressive voice.

"Of course Grimley is in?"

"Grimley has been defeated by the caucus—*the Liberal caucus.*" The tone in which he pronounced these words lit them up with a scorn which revealed his imprisoned feelings. "They hate him — oh, how they hate him! Nothing is so abhorrent to a Liberal caucus as a genuinely consistent and fearless Liberal. To their hatred of his Liberalism they add their fear of his independence, until their hate not only becomes personal, but is so poisoned with spite that it relentlessly pursues its victim with every shabby misrepresentation that mean malignancy can think of."

"I know," said Claud, a little wearily. Then, as his thoughts went back to Darlington, he said, "I don't see how the dear boy's going to bag his Buckhounds after all."

"The Buckhounds?" asked Lord St Kevan. He was always on the alert when anything was mentioned suggesting the solemn and important subject of the Household appointments.

"He thought his people would probably get it from the next Liberal Government," interposed Claudia.

"Extremely unlikely — extremely unlikely," broke in Lord St Kevan warmly. And he went on to give a list of reasons which, in his opinion, made it extremely improbable that Lord Downstreamdown would have the appointment offered to him. As we have seen before, his idea of the principle of party government meant government by one set of families (specially trained and tempered), alternating with government by a precisely similar set of other families. A good Government meant a strong and capable Executive, for he regarded the legislative functions of a Government more or less in the light of a necessary evil, to be evaded and ignored as much as possible. And therefore he had been

accustomed to look upon the Household appointments as of the utmost importance to the well-being of the State, and was always a little shocked if he heard expectations lightly expressed on grounds which were insufficient, that this or that person would manage to get a particular post when the other party came into power.

At last Claudia, as the responsible nurse, felt compelled to hint in the gentlest manner that she thought Claud had had enough excitement for one day. Lord St Kevan was seized with remorse. He pressed Claud's hand; he forbade him to speak another word. Then adding that he knew his departure was really the kindest to both, he left them—the patient settling to sleep, and his young girl-guardian sitting so quietly at his side, watching for any sign that might tell of change, waiting to gratify even his lightest wish, and praying with steadfast faith that he might be restored to health once more, as only a good and loving woman can wait and watch and pray.

Claudia all this time had borne up bravely. She had alike resisted despondency and the growing fatigue which comes with continuous nursing in

a sick-room. The nurse, it is true, sat up with Claud during each night, but Claudia was almost his sole companion through every long uneventful day. She believed—in her heart she felt sure—that he would recover. She never allowed her mind for an instant to dwell on the awful alternative. In the solemn battle that life and death were waging over her darling, she felt that her passionate love, her earnest prayers, must avail him somewhat, must constrain kindly nature to give back his life to them both for a little longer. But the strain was telling upon her. To sit, and watch, and listen, and wonder, and think, hour after hour, while the shadow that fell from the edge of the blind and passed over the wall, when the sun was shining, became in her fancy a sun-dial, hung there as the only record that time was still passing—gave her at times a dream-like feeling that some other world had claimed them, and that their lives must have passed away to a land of the might-have-been.

The doctor had ordered that Claud should be kept as quiet as possible, and Mrs Denbigh had been the only visitor admitted into the sick-room.

Even her visits were brief. To Claud they appeared like a gracious vision, a few kind words, a kiss, and a gentle rustle of softly retreating skirts. He had not, however, been all the time lying in the half-conscious state which generally followed the doses of medicine they were compelled to give him. Sometimes he woke up quite himself, and then he and Claudia talked in that casual discursive way which is pleasant when one is ill and the mind wanders lightly from subject to subject, touching on each and dropping it for another with the wilful restless lassitude fever so often produces. They discussed their favourite books, and people, and fancies, and hopes, and ideals.

"Putting aside the great unapproachable masters," Claud said one day, "Chopin, and Keats, and Fred Walker remain my own particular favourites. One seems to have a kind of personal fondness and tenderness for them, such as one only feels for one's intimate friends."

"You mustn't let Mrs Leo hear you talking like that. By the way, she has quite recovered from her attack of fever. Well, I was chatting with her the other day, and we happened to touch upon

'Lohengrin.' 'Parts of it are so lovely, but other parts are so tedious,' I remarked. 'Ah,' she said, 'you feel that, do you? so do I. Some parts of it are so hideous and so tedious, they are almost commonplace enough to have been written by one of the Italians themselves; but the opera is saved by the great duet.' 'Yes,' I replied, 'Elsa and Lohengrin sitting together while the twilight——' 'You don't mean to say that you call *that* the great duet,' she cried; 'why, that's the most wretched, insipid, incomprehensible thing in the whole opera. Of course *the* great duet is that exquisite masterpiece which Ortruda and Telramondo sing in the second act.'"

"She seems quite up to her old form. She must have got well very quickly."

"She has; they left for Sienna yesterday."

Claud seemed so much better the day after Lord St Kevan's visit, that when Darlington reached Pompeii, having left home the moment his own election was over, the doctor decided that they might see each other.

Darlington, warned and drilled by advice, came into the room on tiptoe.

"Poor old chap," he said, in a voice that was hushed with concern, "you look awfully bad. I have come to fetch you home as soon as you're well enough."

"Ah, dear boy, you were always ready to fag for me—weren't you? But we mustn't be inconsiderate, keeping you here away from your Parliamentary duties," said Claud, with almost pathetic playfulness.

"You mustn't make Claud talk, Lord Darlington," said Claudia, warningly. "You know I'm a sort of tyrant set over him to keep him quiet."

"I'll do all the talking," answered Darlington, sitting down and beginning already to feel more at home in the sick-room, and more reassured as to Claud's recovery. "Isn't it fun to think of our both being in Parliament together; and sitting on opposite sides of the House too! Why, we shall be able to wink at each other over the front benches."

"Aren't you going to sit below the gangway?" asked Claud, mischievously.

"Below the gangway! certainly not," answered Darlington stoutly, though it must be admitted

that he had but the faintest idea what kind of members are accustomed to occupy that position.

"I just looked into Redburn's show as I went through town," he continued. "The private view —such a squash, one couldn't even get into the room. All the smart people in town were there. The pictures are all what Redburn calls 'pictorial moments.' A good deal more moment than picture about them, I think. The old Johnnie's better at polo than painting, after all—though he tells me that plenty of people buy his things."

"Perhaps that is because he *is* good at polo," said Claudia, shrewdly.

"I said to him, 'Well, I suppose you've got all that is most eminent in art and literature here this afternoon?' And what do you think he said? Well, he said, 'All that is most eminent in art and literature! My dear chap, I hope I haven't fallen quite so low as that.'"

"He really reminds one of Mr Phœbus in 'Lothair,'" said Claudia.

"Of course he was only joking," said Darlington.

"And how is Miss van Knut?" asked Claud.

"Eliza? oh, she's awfully fit," answered Darling-

ton, with the easy air of a proprietor. "She was thundering good at canvassing, I can tell you. She wants me to go to America for a visit. She says that they all have a perfectly lovely time there. Even the murderers have a lovely time,—they sit in prison receiving calls from ladies, and bouquets, and flowers; and they're interviewed, and every word that they say comes out in the papers. She says you feel just important enough to be an archbishop. She has made a great success in London; and she's wild with delight because she has been asked to the ball at Marlborough House."

The stream of talk would have flowed on for ever, had not Lord St Kevan's entrance brought it to a conclusion. He came in to pay Claud a little visit, and Darlington rose when he entered. The two chatted together about the elections. Lord St Kevan "availed himself of the opportunity," as he expressed it, to offer Darlington his congratulations on his successful contest.

"It gave me particular satisfaction to hear that you were in. We want to see a great many more young fellows like you in the House," he said, in perfect good faith and without the least tinge of

satire. "The Commons are the best training for the Lords, after all. And in the House, as it is, Giles's gang are already a great deal too numerous."

"What is he up to now?" asked Darlington.

"The last thing I heard of Giles," Lord St Kevan replied, "was his answer to a remonstrance which somebody made when he proposed some new legislation which might come in conflict with one of the Ten Commandments. His reply was as follows: 'We must remember that they're only "paper commandments," after all, and will have to adapt themselves sooner or later, like everything else, to the wishes of the majority.'" And the tone of his lordship's voice could leave no one in doubt as to his lordship's opinion of both the words and the speaker.

"He a little overdoes it," put in Claud; "he comes dangerously near burlesquing his Master.

"They say he hopes for a baronetcy," Darlington went on.

"A baronetcy! he hope for a baronetcy!" gasped Lord St Kevan, in a voice so compressed, so intense, so portentous, that it showed by its note it

was only consideration for Claud which prevented its being an outburst of thunder. "Oh, of course that report is a mere *canard*. A man's hopes, as we find, are unbounded; but, after all, the fellow can't be a perfect fool, and he must know that he is about as likely to be made a baronet as I am to be made—to be made Emperor of China."

The old man's unpractical, old-fashioned, feudal ideas as to the suitability of the recipient selected for the bestowal of honours, must be excused by remembering that this story is almost a fairy tale, and that in reality nothing could be more probable than that a man in Mr Giles's position should be rewarded by such a promise. Our only thought should be one of pride at his moderation in not demanding a peerage as a recompense for his arduous services on behalf of the State.

CHAPTER XXIV.

As the days passed by and triumphant summer began to assert itself, Claud gradually grew weaker. There was no longer any chatter in the hushed and darkened bedroom. Politics were not mentioned, jokes were unmade. When Lord St Kevan or Darlington came to see him, they only stayed a little while, murmuring those broken commonplaces of affection which strive so piteously to give tongue to a man's silent and reticent sympathy,—which seem so insufficient to the speaker, and yet come so soothingly to the young sufferer, after all.

Claud was now often almost unconscious for days together. His life was made up of far-away visions of earliest childhood. They recurred with a vividness lent by realisation. He dreamt of those almost forgotten days when loving arms carried him, hush-

ing him gently into his evening sleep; when he looked for a mother's smile to reward him for trying to do his best; when his first pony, galloping up the turf, thrilled him with a delight which was all the stronger because of the throb of terror which caught his breath as they started.

He sat once more in the high square pew of the grey parish church, pervaded still with the faint sense of drowsy contentment he knew so well in the old days. The quiet Sunday morning passed on as it used to pass, so gently, so lingeringly, that he felt he might soon have dropped asleep, if the hymns had not come at intervals, to demand his attention; for, with boyish energy, he always had given the whole of his little heart and voice to the singing. He gazed once again at the cherubs' heads flanking the quaint memorial tablets along the walls. They still had the air of brooding mystery which had helped the boy to spin those unnumbered self-told histories that make up the dumb yet dearest romances of childhood.

Next he found himself scampering over the pleasant country-side to drink tea with old Mrs Briggs, the keeper's wife, whose rose-covered cottage stood

on the edge of the park, where the young winds came so softly, bringing the scent of the clover-fields into the snug little parlour. Unnumbered lumps of sugar had made his tea the sweetest, the most delicious, that he had ever tasted. The thin bread-and-butter; the strawberries, when the warmth had ripened them fully; the curds and cream; the milk-jug shaped like a cow, which lifted up by its tail and poured milk from its open mouth; the absence of any guardian power whose restraining selection might tend to curtail his generous choice; old Mrs Briggs's creeping stories even, which were all the more ghastly because they were "perfectly true," and which told of death-watches, of fatal inherited curses, of haunted houses, of horrid ghouls which feast on the festering limbs of the dead, and shadowy shuddering ghosts that at times would titter and scream, at times would "mutter and peep,"—these various joys all tended to give to the little festival a peculiar enchantment.

In his dreams he passed through many other events of his boyish daytime, until at last he found himself safely tucked up once more in his own little bed, the cosy particular bed of his childhood. He

lay quite quietly, having that happy sense of tranquil wakefulness children often feel when their bedtime has come, before they are ready to leave the bright day hand in hand with sleep. The room had always been called his, from days which ran back beyond memory. The last stain of sunset was fading across the familiar ceiling. The wall-paper pattern, whose angles he counted so often, was mingling and blending with the gathering twilight. The warm dusk was filled with the scent of the dropping laburnum and lilac blossoms. Even the last tired twitter of birds had ceased. The day was passing so quietly into the hush of the summer night, coming at length, imperceptibly and reluctantly, to give rest to all toiling life. And the boy caught the hum of a tardy belated bee going home to his hive, and heard the clustering roses rustle against the open casement. The lurking shadows had weaved themselves into an uprising veil of darkness; but the luminous sky was still bright through the window, and friendly stars peeped out one by one to keep the boy company.

His head had turned at last to nestle into the

pillow. His eyes were just capitulating to slumber, when a light tread broke on the stillness. A mother's caressing hand smoothed the bedclothes. Once more a mother's kiss touched his forehead. And he saw through his lashes the diamond rings sparkling upon the fingers that shaded the candle so carefully.

"Good night, my son," said that voice he had known he should never hear again.

"Oh, mother, mother," he cried, with a sudden yearning passion, "don't leave me; stay with me always." He stretched out his craving arms, and awoke, as he caught with startled despair at the emptiness.

Darlington sat by his side. The hot sun was shining. The medicine bottles and cooling drinks on the table stood up there grimly—a silent row of inevitable reminders.

"You've been unconscious, but now you feel better; don't you, old man?" said Darlington, kindly.

"I've been dreaming—dreaming I was a child again. Life is sweet after all," he added, half to himself.

He was thirsty, and Darlington got him an iced drink. Then he settled down to hear some of the passing events of the last few days. When Claud heard that the Liberals had gone out and the Conservatives come in, he suddenly gave one look of exultant triumph.

"I always have thought that the flight to Varennes and the death of Gordon are the two most heartbreaking events in all modern history," he said, as though his mind had already passed on to another interest. "The flight to Varennes failed through adverse fate; but Gordon was simply entrapped, deserted, sacrificed, to suit the convenience of him who has now at last been defeated. Heaven often lets men escape justice in this world, but such betrayals are always punished sooner or later."

Poor Claud's mind had frequently been wandering lately; it must have been wandering now. Darlington wisely did not notice his wild unmeaning words; it was better to pass them by unanswered.

When the doctor came in the evening, he still gave them hope, but only the slightest. They sat in the room, not talking much, simply letting the time pass on — the minutes pass into hours, and

the hours pass into the night—while they waited for any change that might come to their suffering charge.

A faint sweet voice was heard singing far, far away in the dim distance. Claud had not spoken for hours; now he suddenly said, "I was always theatrical: fancy if I were to die to slow music after all!"

"But, darling, you mustn't talk like that," Claudia whispered.

"The doctor says you may soon be better," added Lord St Kevan.

"If I do not—do not get better," Claud went on, "I should like my grave covered with roses. On the tombstone, Thanatos, the angel of death, standing with an inverted torch; and just the one text, 'Underneath are the everlasting arms.'" He seemed for a moment troubled. "I know there is something else," he said. Then he remembered—"I must have a cherub with wings, like the one in the old church at home."

Lord St Kevan promised. The silence was broken by Claud, who suddenly asked them to read him "Jackanapes." The book was fetched, and

Claudia began that most touching of all little stories — the most tenderly perfect tale of a brave young life that has ever been given to childhood.

She read to the end, though her voice at times sank to a trembling whisper.

"Any life would have been worth living, if one could have died for a friend—like that," murmured Claud, pressing her dear hand to give her his silent thanks.

As he lay with his eyes closed, he hummed to himself the wistful air in 'Aïda,' which wails so mournfully through the last sad scene of constancy and death. He felt himself floating slowly through endless space, weightless and helpless. The warm hand still clasping his, seemed the only link that retained him to this world's brink. He gradually sank to a state between waking and sleeping. For him all time had ceased to be. But the long hours of darkness grew endless to Claudia as she sat on and on. The night-light threw up gigantic shadows across the ceiling. They danced in weird mockery to its flickering. Every two hours she rose to assist the nurse in giving him medicine. She lifted him

up in her arms, while the nurse held the cup to his lips; and this was the only event which told her their vigil must end at last. She choked back the sobs which rose at the thought that perhaps this might be the last night she should ever be able to watch by her lover on earth. A dumb sense of instinctive despair clouded over her. Her feelings broke into consciousness with an almost inaudible moan of hopelessness. Would she never again hear the voice that had woke her answering love—never again see the bright face that used to look down on her with its smile of welcome, before it stooped for a kiss? There are griefs too great to realise perfectly. They are known, and felt, and borne with a surrendering helplessness which is almost a resignation.

As the grey dawn broke on the darkness, Claud stirred a little. Lord St Kevan and Darlington came in softly. They had been resting in a neighbouring room. The only sound was a whispered question, a hushed reply.

The coming day flushed across the sky in dissolving bars of gold. The room was alight with its herald radiance. It called on the world to wake,

and seemed for a moment to summon Claud back from the shores of the other world.

He opened his eyes, and they fell upon Darlington. "Dear old chap," he whispered. "Good-bye —we shall never have any fun in the Commons after all."

He looked towards Claudia. She stood at his side and bravely smiled. He smiled back at her in return—the last, the sweetest smile she had ever known. "So soon," he whispered. "I am only sorry for your sake, darling. It won't be long. Try not to mind too much." His beautiful eyes brimmed full of a sudden delight. They looked into regions where even love cannot follow. "Mother," he said—"mother, I am coming to you at last." And before their radiance had wholly faded for ever, he had already passed beyond the dim river which bounds each life from the land that knows no to-morrow.

. . . . . .

Pompeii has ceased to be. Its expenses were found to be too great to "keep it up"; its unhealthiness (caused by its want of adequate drainage) produced a panic through all Society, and

frightened the coy spirit Fashion away for ever. Mr Smythe had already turned his attention to an attempt to start a club in London on the same lines as that of the Merlitons in Paris. As Pompeii had only received his patronage, never his cash, he bore its failure with almost heartless equanimity.

It was next converted into a grand casino—a kind of idealised tea-garden; but even in this guise its failure became complete. Then other careers were tried in vain, until at last it was given up—it was wholly abandoned, and left for the siren wind and sunshine to softly caress away into the shadowy places of reminiscence. A pathetic air of desertion appropriated the lonely place. The dumb streets and bright open places silently crumbled. The neglected rooms stood on stolidly, filling up, as time passed, with the beams and plaster and wood-work that dropped from the slowly decaying ceilings; yet with all this trying to bear up bravely, each one as long as it could, before it joined the littering dust that awaited its final fall. The gentle ruin that nature works so gradually and so tenderly that its encroachments

are only proclaimed by the spreading creepers and delicate flowers she scatters before its footsteps, at last took possession of all things. And the poor ephemeral little city sank back once more into nothingness, and passed away where its only dwelling-place is in memory's quiet keeping.

THE END.

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